



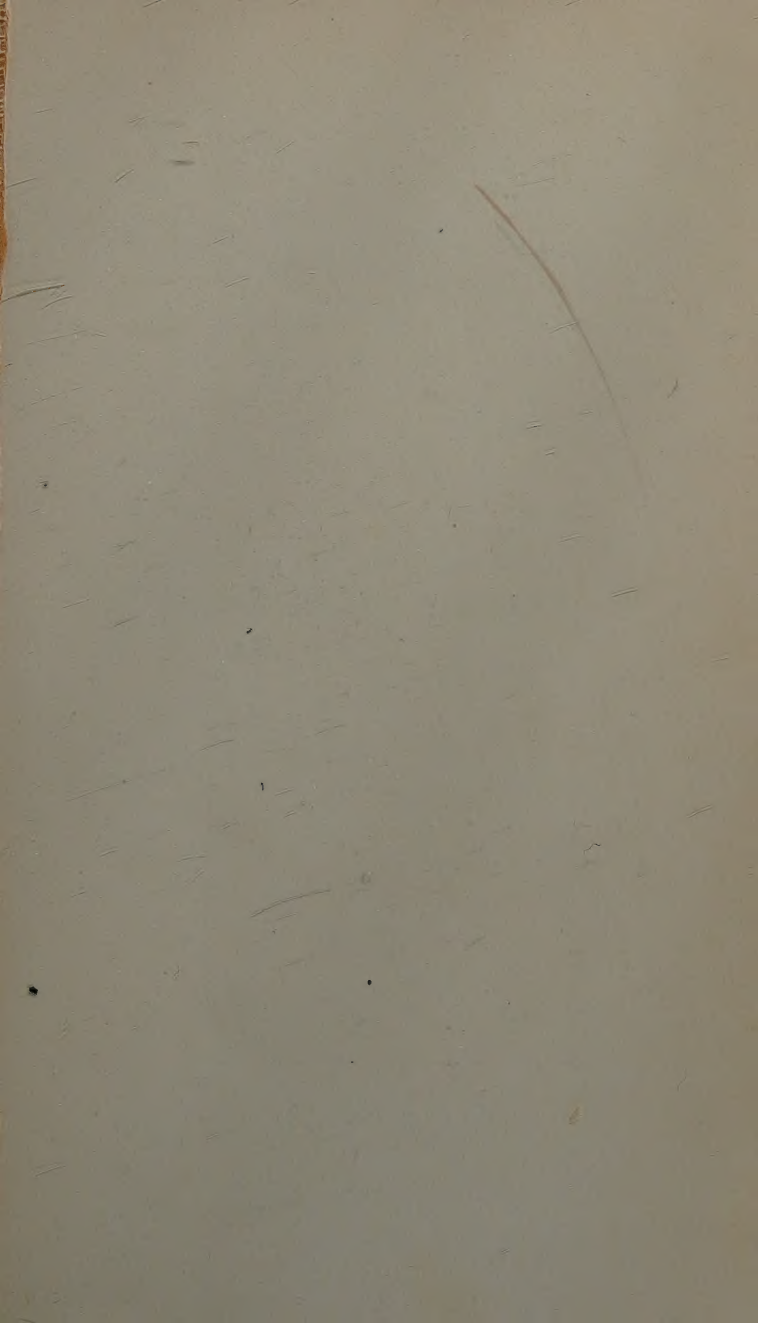
Margaret Carnegie  
Library



Accession No. 36133

Class 809.2 Book H218c

---







**CONVERSATIONS ON  
CONTEMPORARY DRAMA**

*Other Books by*  
CLAYTON HAMILTON

---

THE THEORY OF THE THEATRE  
STUDIES IN STAGECRAFT  
PROBLEMS OF THE PLAYWRIGHT  
SEEN ON THE STAGE

*Published by*  
HENRY HOLT & Co.

---

A MANUAL OF THE ART OF FICTION  
ON THE TRAIL OF STEVENSON  
WANDERINGS (*In Preparation*)

*Published by*  
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & Co.

# CONVERSATIONS ON CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON

MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS

Mills College Library  
Withdrawn

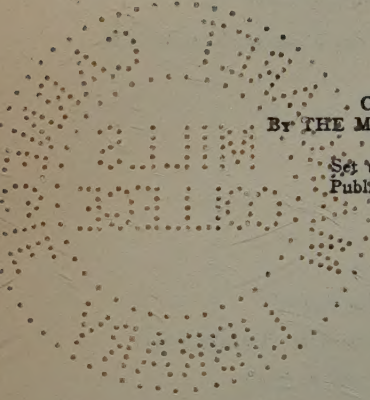
*A Series of Nine Lectures,  
Delivered in Earl Hall, at Columbia University,  
from February 11 to April 7, 1924.*

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1924

*All rights reserved*



COPYRIGHT, 1924,  
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

---

Set up and electrotyped.  
Published October, 1924.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

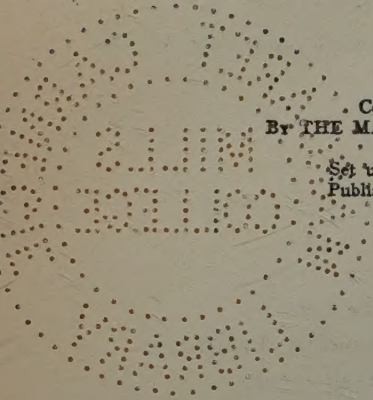
809.2

H218c

36133

TO  
THE THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS,  
AT COLUMBIA AND ELSEWHERE,  
WHO, FOR TWENTY YEARS, HAVE LISTENED  
TO MY TALKS ABOUT THE DRAMA.





. COPYRIGHT, 1924,  
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

---

Set up and electrotyped.  
Published October, 1924.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

809.2

H2183

36133

TO  
THE THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS,  
AT COLUMBIA AND ELSEWHERE,  
WHO, FOR TWENTY YEARS, HAVE LISTENED  
TO MY TALKS ABOUT THE DRAMA.



## PREFACE

HERE is a book that was not written at a desk, but improvised upon a lecture-platform in the presence of an audience. It is a stenographic record of a series of informal lectures delivered in Earl Hall, at Columbia University, on nine successive Monday mornings, from February 11 to April 7, 1924.

When it was announced that this course would be open to the public, my friend Mr. George P. Brett, the President of The Macmillan Company, told me that he would like to publish the lectures in a volume. Mr. Brett had never heard me talk in public; and I perceived that he had assumed that I was a lecturer, of the sort that we so frequently import from London, who, appearing on the platform with a printed or typewritten pamphlet, proceeds to read it from the outset to the end, and, having done so, travels elsewhere, to read the same text to another audience. I hastened to explain that my public talks were not lectures in the formal sense, but merely conversations, that I carried nothing to the platform except the ideas in my head and the watch in my hand, that I improvised my conversations as I went along, and that whether I happened to be good or not depended mainly on the reaction of the audience. Since I did not plan my lectures in advance and rarely remembered an hour afterward any-

thing that I had said, I could see no way to furnish Mr. Brett with the volume he was kind enough to wish to publish.

But Mr. Brett is a persistent gentleman, who is not accustomed to be thwarted in his purposes. He immediately offered to send a stenographer up to Earl Hall to take down every word that I said, and he suggested that, with a little editing, these stenographic reports could be prepared for publication. It was Mr. Brett's idea that, in this period of university extension, many people who might have liked to attend such a course of lectures if they had lived within commuting distance of Columbia University might like to have a record of the lectures made available to them in print.

I received this suggestion with considerable perturbation, because it seemed to controvert the only conscience that ever really troubles me,—the conscience of the craftsman. For twenty years I had practiced the two professions of lecturing and writing; but, in all that time, I had never written a single paragraph that I intended to speak nor dictated a single paragraph that I intended to print. I explained to Mr. Brett that writing was one thing and talking was another, that the technical processes of the two professions were entirely distinct, that my best writing would be unspeakable and my best talking would be unreadable; but he countered this argument with the suggestion that, if all my other books contained a record of my writing, there was no particular reason why this one book should not contain a record of my speaking.



'After considerable hesitance, I agreed to try the plan as an experiment. I was afraid that I might suffer from stage-fright if I ever paused to realize that everything that I was saying was being taken down in shorthand and might subsequently be used against me; and it was, therefore, arranged that the stenographer should hide herself in the audience so that I should not see her and might forget that she was there. During the first lecture, I was a little worried and, every now and then, became too fussy with my phraseology for fear of the stenographer; but, after that, I actually managed to forget that the recording angel was present with poised pencil and to swing into my natural habit of talking to the audience without self-consciousness.

To read the stenographic records seemed as strange to me at first as the experience of hearing my own voice upon the phonograph or seeing my own figure on the motion picture screen. I had never known before exactly how I talked. I had always known that my manner of speaking was very different from my style of writing; for, in following the two professions, I had deliberately practiced different methods for the attainment of different ends. But I had never had an opportunity before to analyze exactly the various distinctions between the two technical methods of expression.

In writing for the printed page, the craftsman strives for literary finish, for finality of form; but this effect must be carefully avoided in talking to an audience. I have found in practice that the only expedient by which I can hold the attention of an audience for an hour is

an appearance of unfettered spontaneity. This is the reason why I never plan a lecture in advance. I want, of course, to know enough about the subject to be able to talk about it at least five times as long as the lecture is to last; I want to know the leading points that I am likely to discuss, and the probable order in which I shall take them up; but I do not want to know beforehand the arrangement of details, and I try always to catch the mood which is to dominate the conversation from experimenting with the audience. My only notebook is the dial of my watch: as the minute hand goes round, I proportion my points accordingly.

The expression of the same idea is more compact in writing than in speaking. A thought which, on the printed page, would receive complete expression in one hundred words may require three or four hundred words for presentation on the lecture-platform. Because of the physical effort involved in listening, an audience cannot take in an idea that is expressed too briefly. For this reason, talk is necessarily thinner in its thought-content than writing. Repetition, which the writer especially avoids, must be practiced by the speaker as a technical expedient. He can see by looking at his auditors whether or not they have completely grasped the point he is expounding; and, if they have not grasped it, he must subtly manage to repeat himself without letting them perceive that he is doing so. Such a subterfuge is not necessary on the printed page. The writer may compact his thought into a single carefully written sentence; for this single

sentence will stand there on the page, to be looked at whenever the reader may find it necessary to refer to it again.

The audience is an active collaborator in any lively lecture. A point that goes well with the audience will suggest others that are similar and will often tempt the speaker to digress from the main path of his discourse; and, on the other hand, an indication from the audience that the talk is growing dull may often require a sudden change of mood and an alteration of the plan of the attack. It is these acrobatics which are unforeseen that give a zest to lecturing and differentiate it from the more methodical and steadfast task of literary composition.

The writer, if his work is going badly, can lay his pen aside at any moment and try again another day; but the lecturer must keep on talking until his hour is up. Even when his thoughts come haltingly, he must never hesitate in his discourse; for, if he begins to fumble around for words, the auditors will be afflicted with that feeling of distress which arises from a subconscious desire to help him out. The speaker, therefore, must employ the readiest method of expression, even when he knows that it is not the best; he has no time to edit or rewrite a sentence in his mind while he is progressing from the initial capital to the terminal period. For this reason, the rhythm of speech is more brisk, more staccato, more headlong in its onward rush than the more deliberately modulated rhythm of written prose.

In preparing these stenographic records for the press, I have deleted a few digressions and cut out a few repetitions; but, in the main, I have left the text unaltered. I have made no attempt to rewrite it in literary terms. My other books were deliberately written to be read; but this book is frankly an experiment in the broadcasting of unpremeditated speech from the lecture-platform to a distant audience.

The name of the stenographer who took these lectures down is Miss Katherine King. I regret to say that I have never met her personally and should not recognize her if she should be sitting in the seat beside me the next time that I attend the theatre. But, whatever Mr. Brett may think of the result of our collaboration, it gives me a curious sensation to reflect that somewhere in the world there lives a lady whom I have never seen, but who nevertheless has written a book that bears my name upon the title page. I wonder how often she was bored when she was writing it, and how frequently she wished that I would think more keenly or express myself more clearly. Somehow I hope that she will never tell.

CLAYTON HAMILTON

NEW YORK CITY: 1924.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	vii
FIRST LECTURE	
THE CONTEMPORARY DRAMA . . . . .	3
SECOND LECTURE	
EDMOND ROSTAND . . . . .	20
THIRD LECTURE	
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW . . . . .	42
FOURTH LECTURE	
SIR JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE . . . . .	68
FIFTH LECTURE	
SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO . . . . .	95
SIXTH LECTURE	
JOHN GALSWORTHY . . . . .	124
SEVENTH LECTURE	
LUIGI PIRANDELLO AND MAURICE MAETERLINCK . . . . .	150
EIGHTH LECTURE	
AMERICAN DRAMA AT THE PRESENT TIME . . . . .	175
NINTH LECTURE	
EUGENE G. O'NEILL . . . . .	198





**CONVERSATIONS ON  
CONTEMPORARY DRAMA**



# CONVERSATIONS ON CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

## FIRST LECTURE

### THE CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

FEBRUARY 11, 1924

ONLY a quarter of a century ago, when I was still an undergraduate in college, students were taught that there were three, or possibly four, great periods in the history of the drama,—the period of the Greeks at the time of Sophocles, the period of the Elizabethans at the time of Shakespeare, the period of the Spaniards at the time of Calderon (though our teachers were a little vague about this period, because few of them knew anything about it), and the period of the French at the time of Corneille, Racine, and Molière. At that time, toward the close of the eighteen-nineties, we were never told that the nineteenth century drama was worthy of studious consideration or that the contemporary drama was of any importance at all. Yet a great new drama had been launched into the world as long before as 1830, when the French romantics, led by Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas *père*, had revolutionized the art of the stage. This drama had been developed later by realistic writers like Emile Augier

and Alexandre Dumas *filis*, and had been passed on to a great genius in Norway, the grim and tragic giant of the north. Henrik Ibsen had already attained his maturity and even passed the climax of his career in 1890; and his influence was making its impress in many other countries. A vivid new drama was launched in England by Sir Arthur Pinero in 1893 and was quickly developed by Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Sir James Barrie, and Mr. Bernard Shaw. Germany came forward with the striking and influential plays of Hermann Sudermann and Gerhardt Hauptmann; the mysterious Maeterlinck appeared in Belgium; and important dramatic work was taken up and done in many other countries. Yet, when I was an undergraduate in college at the end of the eighteen-nineties, this contemporary drama was still considered unworthy of academic consideration, unworthy of serious study.

Of course, the only reason for so monstrous an anomaly was that the modern drama seemed too new and too near to our scholarly professors a quarter of a century ago. They were afraid it might not last, and they were not willing to run the risk of wasting any academic hours in a study of the possibly ephemeral. They did not know as much about the permanence of "Cyrano de Bergerac" in 1898, for instance, as we have learned in 1924. Time had taught them to be sure of Shakespeare; but they were not yet sure that Ibsen would outlast the nineteenth century. In this connection, I might remind you of an anecdote which some of you undoubtedly have heard. When Sir Arthur



Pinero, several years ago, was solemnly asked to formulate a definition of classic English comedy, he answered, "A classic English comedy is a successful farce by a writer who is dead."

I am very glad, however, that the academic attitude toward the contemporary drama has become more appreciative in the course of the last quarter of a century. Otherwise I should not be permitted to stand here, in a lecture hall of a great university, and talk to you, on nine successive Monday mornings, about plays that are actually being done in the theatre of to-day. But everybody nowadays—including even the most scholarly professors in our colleges—has at last become aware of the fact that we are living in the midst of a very wonderful period of dramatic creativity,—a period more vast and varied, more widespread and more versatile in its productiveness, than even those other great periods that I have mentioned,—the Greek, the Spanish, the Elizabethan, and the classic French. We are sure, at least, that the drama of the present period is great in quantity; and we have ample reason to believe that much of it is great in quality. At any rate, it is unquestionably worthy of serious study; and we enjoy the rare and great advantage of living in the midst of it and being able to watch it come into existence.

As students of the theatre, I think we should be rather proud of the fact that we are living in a period of such importance. A large number of centuries elapsed between the first two periods of greatness in

the drama,—the period of Sophocles in the fifth century B.C. and the period of Shakespeare at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century A.D. Millions of people who were born and lived and died in that long interval of over two thousand years were not able to see any great play produced on a stage for the first time in the world. After the death of Molière, there was another interval of emptiness—not so long, indeed—a lapse of only one hundred and fifty to two hundred years—during which it was impossible for people anywhere to attend the first performance on the stage of any play of permanent importance. Yet, living in the present period, I have actually attended the world-première of several plays that seem destined to endure in the world's dramatic literature for centuries to come. In our own city of New York, which, since the war, has become the metropolis of the theatric world, we have frequent opportunities to observe the first production anywhere, or at least the first production in America, of plays that are immeasurably more important than any that were written in all the twenty centuries between Sophocles and Shakespeare. To remain obtuse to the contemporary drama, to refuse to regard it as worthy of most serious consideration, would be very much like living in Elizabethan London and neglecting to attend a performance of "Hamlet" or "Othello."

Yet the experience of living in a period of such dramatic productivity is so remarkable that it is a little difficult for us to appreciate the privilege. My

own experience of theatre-going has covered a range of a third of a century. I began to attend the theatre regularly and systematically when I was about eight years old; and for nearly thirty-five years I have seen every play of any importance that has been produced in New York, not to mention plays that I have seen in other countries. That is not a long time, as history is measured: yet think how much has happened in those three decades and a half! When I began to go to the theatre, "Cyrano de Bergerac" had not been written. It is now established as an immortal masterpiece. When I began to go to the theatre, Sir James Barrie had not yet commenced to write plays. Mr. John Galsworthy had never been heard of; and I distinctly remember how queer I thought his name when I attended the first performance of his first play, "The Silver Box." Ibsen, of course, had nearly completed his life work when I was a boy, though I attended the first performances of his plays that were given in America; but think how much has been contributed to the drama of the world since the death of Ibsen! For instance, the entire literary movement that culminated in the establishment of the Irish National Theatre was launched less than thirty years ago; and it has given the world the deathless eloquence of J. M. Synge. Whenever we consider "The Playboy of the Western World," we feel as if it must always have belonged to dramatic literature; we feel, also, that the plays of Lord Dunsany must have existed for a long, long time; yet I was going to the theatre before these plays were written and,

at the age of forty-two, I still persist in regarding myself as a member of "the younger generation." All of you are so familiar with the plays of J. M. Barrie that I will wager that it is a little difficult for you to realize that your grandparents never had the opportunity to see them. "Peter Pan" is so familiar to us nowadays that it is hard to imagine a world in which this fairy-tale did not exist. Great plays are now so frequent that their occurrence has become almost commonplace. I dare say that that is the reason why we spend so much energy worrying over the decadence of the stage and wondering what we can do to reform the theatre. People are constantly writing to the papers, lamenting the low estate to which the drama has declined and regretting the good old days; and I suppose that people uttered similar complaints in the period of Shakespeare and the period of Sophocles.

One reason why it is difficult for us to realize the importance of the contemporary drama is that it has not as yet been adequately analyzed, adequately appreciated, and adequately celebrated by dramatic criticism. Of course, in the history of any art, creation always precedes criticism, since criticism is merely an analysis of what has been created. The critic cannot do his work until he has something to criticize. His function is not to tell the dramatist how to make great plays, but to tell the public how great plays have been made. Consequently, criticism usually lags a generation or so behind creation. The great Greek dramatic critic, Aristotle, was not a contemporary of Euripides and

Sophocles; he came a generation later, and saw their work in retrospect. It takes about that long for a great movement in art to find its great critic; and I dare say that it may be twenty-five or fifty years before the real significance of our present-day creation in the drama is adequately analyzed and definitely estimated by commensurate dramatic criticism.

In this country at the present time we seem to be unfortunately lacking in dramatic criticism. In saying that, I have no intention of disparaging the reviewing of current plays as it is handled so entertainingly and oftentimes so charmingly by the writers for our metropolitan newspapers. I think that the literary standard of our newspaper reviewing is unusually high; but I don't think that much of this reviewing has anything to do with criticism. What Aristotle was endeavoring to do was very different from what Mr. Broun or Mr. Woolcott succeed in doing so delightfully. I perceive that I ought to tell you what criticism is; but I haven't time for that—it would take at least an hour—and, besides, if you really want to know, all you have to do is to read Matthew Arnold. He will tell you, among other things, that the purpose of criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is,—to see *the object*, mind you, and to write about the object,—not to write about oneself. A theatrical reviewer may say, "I saw a certain play last night and I did not like it at all"; but this statement has nothing to do with criticism if the reviewer goes on to say that the reason why he did not like the play is that his little boy had kept him awake

the night before with whooping-cough. When the modern English drama was initiated in the eightennineties by Pinero and Jones, it was earnestly and seriously criticized by William Archer and Arthur Bingham Walkley and George Bernard Shaw; and the modern French drama has been excellently analyzed throughout the course of its development, because the French have a mind that is peculiarly adapted to the purposes of criticism. But dramatic criticism is sorely needed here and now, because the productive activity of the contemporary theatre is so vast as to be bewildering. There has never been a period in the past when there has been so much to appreciate, and so many different kinds of things to appreciate, in the drama of the moment; and it is difficult for the public, without critical guidance, to learn to appreciate at the same time so many different kinds of creative endeavor.

It is an important point that the present period is the first great period in history when the drama has existed as an international art, when the drama has been practiced in many different countries at the same time, and when there has been an active interchange of plays between the theatres of the different nations. This is the first time in the history of the drama when there has existed what I may call a standardized theatre,—that is to say, when playhouses closely resembling each other in their physical appointments have existed simultaneously in several different countries inhabited by different races speaking different languages. We take this as a matter of course; but, if we will exercise



our historical memories, we shall observe that this condition has never existed before.

In the other great periods of the drama which I have mentioned, dramatic art was confined to a single nation and, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say, to a single city. All the plays that Aristotle saw were written by Athenians and for Athenians. The drama existed in Greece at that time, but it existed in no other country. It is true that certain plays that had been produced successfully in Athens were subsequently reproduced in other cities of Greece and Sicily; but, wherever they were done, the audience was always made up entirely of people of the same race, whose traditions were identical with those of the citizens of Athens. A Greek dramatist, when he wrote his play, was addressing a homogeneous audience of his own people; he could step upon the stage and actually look his entire public in the eyes. Thus, the task of the dramatist, in this particular regard, was much simpler in ancient Greece than is the task of the dramatist to-day. As our theatre is at present constituted, a play of more than ordinary merit is likely to be acted in several different countries and in several different languages; and the author can no longer look his public in the eyes. An emphatic instance of this international aspect of our modern drama was afforded to us a few months ago, when Eleanor Duse inaugurated her farewell tour of America with a performance of Ibsen's "The Lady from the Sea." Here was a play originally written in the Norwegian language, about Norwegian



people, by a Norwegian author, who preferred to live in Germany. It was translated into the Italian language and acted by a company of Italian actors before an English-speaking audience in the metropolis of the new world. I must confess that I found the occasion a little incongruous,—especially when hundreds of enthusiasts who knew little about the play, and even less about the acting of Duse in her prime, stood up and cheered a performance which they could not understand. But the incongruity was less marked when, later in the same engagement, la Duse performed an Italian translation of Ibsen's "Ghosts." Here, I thought, the intention of the dramatist broke through the various barriers of race and language that had been erected between his authorship and the receptivity of the audience. But you will see that a much broader appeal—an appeal that transgresses the boundaries of nationality—is required of a modern dramatist like Ibsen than was required, in the Greek theatre, of a dramatist like Sophocles.

To pursue this point a little further, we may remind ourselves that, again, in the Elizabethan period, the drama was confined to a single country, and practically to a single city. One city was all that Shakespeare had to conquer. I suppose that Elizabethan London contained about two hundred thousand people. I am seldom exact as to figures; but, in any event, it was only a small city. When Shakespeare wrote a play, he knew that his audience was to be composed entirely of English people,—people of the same race, all speaking the

same language, all living in the same community. His audience was a homogeneous one; and he never gave a moment's thought to the possibility of any market for his plays across the channel. Similarly, in the classic period of the French drama, dramatic art was once again confined to one country,—France. It was centralized in one city,—Paris; and, when Molière stepped forth upon the stage to act a comedy that he had written, he knew precisely the sort of people who would be sitting out in front.

But, at the present time, the problem of the dramatist is much more complicated. Although he writes primarily for an audience in his own country, it is inevitable, if he rises to a certain degree of eminence, that he will entertain a hope that his plays may be done elsewhere in the world. American playwrights, with one eye upon New York, have already developed a habit of writing with their other eye on London. The exportation of American plays, not only to England, but also to the various countries of continental Europe, is already more extensive than our general public realizes. Did you know, for instance, that Miss Margaret Mayo's farce called "Baby Mine," which has almost been forgotten in America, has held the stage in Spain for years and years as one of the most perennially popular of modern plays? Dozens of our American plays are now being done in several European languages; and, of course, it is not necessary to remind you that a great many European plays are being acted constantly in the American theatre, particularly in New York.

Now, whether or not an author, even under these conditions, can deliberately make an effort to address a world-wide audience is a question that is difficult to answer. Victorien Sardou, apparently, made this effort and succeeded; but he had Sarah Bernhardt to help him, and his plays were plays of plot instead of plays of character. Ibsen, although he lived for years in Italy and Germany, remained, throughout his long career, quite narrowly Norwegian in his outlook upon life. He never developed a cosmopolitan mind. He wrote about Norwegian people, leading circumscribed and stuffy lives in the provincial towns of Norway, and wrote his plays in the Norwegian language, a language understood by less than five million people in the entire world; yet these plays were ultimately translated into many other languages, and received with great interest by a world-wide audience. I wonder if Ibsen would have succeeded so well in other countries than his own if he had deliberately tried to be less local in his outlook upon life. I am afraid that, if he had said to himself, "I must try to interest not only the Teutonic, but also the Latin nations, I must imagine characters that will be equally interesting to Scandinavian and to Italian audiences," he might not have got anywhere at all. I am quite sure that Edmond Rostand never thought of a cosmopolitan audience when he was writing "Cyrano de Bergerac" for Coquelin. He was thinking only of the Parisian public; and yet his play—though utterly and absolutely French—captivated the entire world.

While apparently it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for a dramatist to attempt to address the whole world—except in the instance of a playwright so essentially mechanical and so professionally adroit as Victorien Sardou—yet we see that it has become customary, in the present period, for any play that is conspicuously successful in its own country to be shown in many other countries. Our leading dramatists are now expected to put into their work some quality that is not merely local, some quality that can transgress the boundaries of language and nationality and race. In this regard the contemporary drama has come to be a very catholic art. It requires a generality of understanding of human nature that was not absolutely necessary in the other great periods of the drama. Racine, for instance, who has always been regarded by the French as a dramatist of unquestionable greatness, is not usually so considered in the English-speaking countries. A finely civilized writer in a finely civilized period of a finely civilized nation, he knew nothing and cared nothing for the barbarians who lived across the channel and spoke the language of Shakespeare. Calderon, also, is almost utterly unknown outside of Spain; for Spain has always been and still remains comparatively out of touch with other countries,—an aloof and lonely nation that other people find it rather difficult to understand.

Now, since the drama has become, for the first time in history, an international art, we may discern one very obvious reason why a complete critical appre-

ciation of the products of the present period cannot logically be expected for several years to come. The task for the dramatic critic at the present time is much too vast. A reviewer of the current theatre in New York has to see between two hundred and three hundred plays a year; yet, at the end of any season, he has not gathered sufficient material for any systematic study of the drama of to-day. So many worthy plays of so many different kinds are being written and produced in so many different countries that he can never hope to see them all or read them all, and, of course, he will never have an opportunity to codify them all and to deduce the laws of the contemporary drama as Aristotle deduced the laws of Greek tragedy from codifying the plays that he had seen.

In the other great periods, dramatic criticism was a comparatively easy task. Aristotle actually saw every play of permanent importance that had been written up to his time; and all these plays, as I have said, were written by Athenians and for Athenians. All of them were planned in accordance with the same technical method. This technical method was developed somewhat during the course of the three generations that extended from Æschylus through Sophocles to Euripides, but it was never basically altered. Aristotle's subject-matter was homogeneous; and it was a simple problem for a man of his clear intellect to deduce from a study of this homogeneous subject-matter the principles which governed it.

Similarly, it is not very difficult for scholarly critics

at the present time to deduce the laws of the Elizabethan drama. The great Elizabethan period endured for only half a century—from 1590 to 1640—and it is possible for a thorough scholar to read all of the extant plays that were written at that time. Again, these plays, as I have said, were written for the public of a single city, and present to the investigator a homogeneous group of documents. The technical method of the Elizabethan dramatists was scarcely altered from the days of Marlowe to the days of Shirley; and when we compare Shakespeare with Webster or Fletcher or Massinger or any of his other fellow-dramatists, we are comparing authors who approached the same problems in the same way and differed not in kind but only in degree. It is a much more difficult task for the critic to compare Pinero and Tchekoff and Maeterlinck and Sudermann and Brieux and Benavente,—to mention only a few of the leading dramatists of recent years; for these authors differ not only in degree but also in kind; they are approaching totally different problems in totally different ways.

In the period of Louis XIV, of France, it was a simple matter for dramatic critics to formulate the laws of French tragedy as practiced by Corneille and Racine, and not particularly difficult to formulate the laws of French comedy as practiced by Molière. But suppose that a dramatic critic should be asked to formulate the laws of the contemporary drama! It can't be done. Too many different kinds of technique are being prac-



ticed simultaneously, and the very faults of one playwright may become the virtues of another. The critic may see a dozen different plays by leading dramatists, and not one of them may show any resemblance to any of the others, either in content or in form. And how is he to find a formula that shall be equally applicable, let us say, to "Hedda Gabler" and to "Peter Pan"?

The ideal dramatic critic, in the present period, would be a rather extraordinary person. He would have to be familiar with many languages, familiar with the life of many different countries, familiar with the modes of thought and feeling of many different nations; and he would have to be so versatile in temperament that he could shift the dominant mood of his mind, from night to night, even from hour to hour, from one nation to another. Some of us are so constituted that, while we are primarily Americans, we have developed through experience certain secondary selves. I am conscious, in my own case, although I am aware that I am not particularly versatile, that it is very easy for me to think and feel in French. The ideal spectator in the theatre would be able to enjoy a play with his French self, or his Italian self, or his Russian self, or even—God help the man!—his German self, so that his mood would be harmoniously suited to the mood of the dramatist. But most spectators, and too many reviewers even, are incapable of such a transformation. They see an Italian play with their American eyes and say, "This is not interesting at all"; whereas, if they could only borrow a pair of Italian eyes through



which to contemplate it, they might find it positively fascinating.

You may have gathered from this preliminary conversation something more than a hint that, in this brief course of nine lectures, I shall make no attempt to cover the entire field of the contemporary drama. All that I can possibly do is to talk of different particular topics within the limits of the general subject; and, in the choice of these particular topics, I shall gladly be guided by your wishes. I have not yet planned this course; and I should prefer to have you plan it for me. I dare say that you would like to have me talk about certain plays and playwrights that have come conspicuously before the public during the progress of the current theatre season in New York, and to remind you, now and then, of other plays and playwrights for the purpose of comparison and contrast. And since the outstanding success of the present season is Mr. Walton Hampden's revival—or reproduction, rather—of "Cyrano de Bergerac," I shall, with your permission, talk next time about Edmond Rostand.

## SECOND LECTURE

### EDMOND ROSTAND

FEBRUARY 18, 1924

SOME of you may know that, as one of the Board of Directors of "Walter Hampden, Incorporated," I had a little to do with Mr. Hampden's decision to restore "Cyrano de Bergerac" to the American stage after a hiatus of twenty-two years. When this project was announced last spring, nearly every friend that Mr. Hampden had in the theatre business advised him not to court disaster with so hazardous an enterprise. They all said that "Cyrano" had been a good play in 1898 but that the public would not want to see it now, after a quarter of a century. Times had changed, and the piece would seem old-fashioned. To this Mr. Hampden answered that, however pertinent the argument might be to a realistic play that had been timely in 1898, it did not apply to "Cyrano," because this piece had not been timely in the year when it was first produced and was just as much out of date a quarter of a century ago as it is out of date to-day. He reasoned also that it would be a new play to all theatre-goers under thirty years of age; and he felt that its buoyant exuberance was a quality that would appeal particularly to the young people in the audience. He was warned by the wiseacres that the public of to-day did

not care for costume dramas and would not listen to a play in verse; and the only way to answer that warning was to produce the piece and find out. At the first performance, on November first, the audience stood up and cheered; and now, in its fourth month, the piece is playing to twenty thousand dollars a week.

This morning, I shall review for you briefly the career of the author of this entrancing play and shall try to point out the most important qualities of his work. It happens that I am only thirteen years younger than Edmond Rostand. His first work was done when I was in my early teens, which is, I think, the very best time to become inoculated with the contagion of this particular writer. "Cyrano de Bergerac" was first produced and swept around the world when I was sixteen years of age; and, in watching the later development of this poetic dramatist, I was able to see everything that he did in the year in which he did it. He died in 1918, at the early age of fifty. So, owing to an accident of dates, I have witnessed his entire career within the limits of my own lifetime. And yet, he does not seem at all to be a contemporary figure. He seems, rather, like some poet long ago and far away; whose verses, like those of Horace, have endured for centuries because their perfectness has shielded them against decay.

Since this is supposed to be a course in the drama, I ought to consider Rostand solely as a dramatist; but, if I may be candid, I must confess at once that he has always appealed to me mainly as a writer. Other men

have invented plays as good as his or better; but no other man has ever shown a greater mastery of words. I have always had an extraordinary fondness for him; and, since I never met him in this world, I almost wish that I believed in the existence of a heaven, so that I might hope some day to sit at his feet and hear him read aloud from his own writings. For it happened that this particular author was one of those who taught me in my teens to love the loveliness of words—a peculiar affection that I have not as yet been able to outlive. I remember how, when I was sixteen, I used to walk the streets repeating the verses of Rostand over and over to myself. I find myself doing it to this day. I do not know very much about the art of writing, because I have not had long enough to practice; but I dare say that I have learned more about it from this particular author than from almost any other—except Dante, of course, and Sir Thomas Browne, and Keats, and Robert Louis Stevenson. I know that Rostand is a writer who appeals with particular poignancy to anybody who has any love for setting words together.

From the critical point of view, I am not sure that Rostand is a great poet; but I know that he is a perfect poet, and perfect poets are perhaps even rarer than great poets. Rostand's literary qualities are, essentially, those of the minor poet. He is dainty, he is delicate, he is witty and pretty, he is charming, he is exquisite. Now, none of these adjectives could be applied to the work of any of the great world-poets;

like Homer or Dante or Shakespeare or Goethe. We do not find in Rostand the magnitude, the majesty, the grandeur that we look for in the major poet. I do not think he ranks among the majors. But if he is merely a minor poet, he is, at least, the largest of the little poets of the world; and, as I said before, he is a perfect poet. By that I mean that he was incapable of writing badly,—that, during his entire life of half a century, he never wrote a bad line and never wrote a phrase that any other writer could possibly improve. Now, this is a virtue that we usually find only in the works of small poets, like Austin Dobson, who do little things, who attempt no big things, and whose product is rather limited. The large poet is likely to be careless. He may write too quickly, like Lord Byron; or he may write rather shaggily, as Walt Whitman did. Whitman was gloriously eloquent when he was at his best; but, also, he could write very badly when he was at his worst. But a great poet may be allowed to write badly. He has so much to say that is of very great importance that, even when the expression is imperfect, the message is still welcome. But a minor poet who does little things must write perfectly. It is his only excuse for writing. Rostand began his career as a writer of minor verse. As time went on, his reach increased, but he never permitted it to exceed his grasp. He became a minor poet raised to the *n*th power; but he remained, essentially, a perfect maker of little things, rather than a vast and careless creator, like Walt Whitman.

The career of Rostand was curious in that it seemed to have no reference to his time. He was brought up in a period of realistic drama, when every one was aping Ibsen; but he took no interest in realism and cared nothing for the fashionable drama of the day. He was utterly unaffected by what was going on about him. All that he cared about was his own work, which had nothing to do with the work of anybody else. He had no predecessors—except Théodore de Banville; but this lovely lyric poet, of course, was not a dramatist. Furthermore, Rostand had no colleagues,—not even any imitators; and he has brought forth no successors. His work was unique; and when he died, it ceased,—a perfect and completed thing. As Jonson said of Shakespeare,—“He was not of an age, but for all time.” A thousand years from now, if his work is read by Ph.D.’s, it will be impossible from internal evidence to assign it to a century. I don’t think that any Ph.D. will argue from internal evidence that the plays of Rostand were written in the nineteenth century, or in the twentieth, or in the eighteenth; and yet they will not seem to have been written in the period of Racine and Molière. Perhaps the surest way to conquer death is to live and work in utter scorn of time.

This poet had a very happy life. He was an aristocrat, he was wealthy, he was a gentleman of leisure. He enjoyed all of those advantages which are popularly regarded as disadvantages to a literary artist. I wonder who it was that started the superstition that a poet



must learn in sorrow what he sings in song and that the best way to get good work out of a writer is to starve him in a garret. I dare say it must have been some publisher or theatre manager. The only handicap to Rostand's career was his delicate physical condition, his chronic ill-health. But he never talked about it. His physical disability was never advertised, like that of Robert Louis Stevenson. Perhaps he might have worked more rapidly if he had been a stronger man; but time meant nothing to him; he had plenty of money, and he could afford to spend ten years in writing "Chantecler."

He was born in Marseilles, in 1868—though the date doesn't matter in the least. He came of a distinguished family. His father, a man of wealth and fine position, was a poet; and his uncle, a noted economist, was also a poet. He was brought up in an atmosphere of luxury and leisure and was accustomed to culture from his earliest years. He wrote verses throughout his childhood and his teens. Then he went up to Paris to acquire a formal education. He studied law at the Lycée Stanislas, which was of course a gentlemanly thing to do, and was admitted to the bar; but he never wasted any time in practicing law. He did not have to earn his living; and it was more important for him to practice the patterning of consonants and vowels. At an early age—twenty-one, I think—he married Rosemonde Gérard,—an excellent lyric poet and a granddaughter of a Marshal of France. Their son, Maurice, is now a very promising



poet and playwright. Rostand's first volume was a collection of little lyrics, called "Les Musardises." This title means, in English, "Wastes of Time"; but though the poems perhaps are not important, they are exquisite and charming, and each is in itself a perfect thing. His earliest plays were produced in his twenties; and the first of all, "Les Romanesques," was immediately accepted by the Comédie Française. He did not have to wait long years for recognition, and he was successful from the very start. "Cyrano de Bergerac" was produced when he was only twenty-nine. It is interesting to note that this is the most successful play that has ever been produced at any time in the history of the drama. Over half a million copies of the original French text have been sold throughout the world; and this number, of course, takes no account of translations into other languages. The play has been acted in nearly every country where a theatre exists, and has always been successful everywhere. It was a great misfortune that this perfect workman died at the early age of fifty. His constitution, as I have said, was always frail; and he died in 1918, of influenza and pneumonia, after an illness of only a few days. In a sense, however, his life work was completed; because I think whatever he might have written in the future would have been similar in character and quality to what he had written in the past. We should have had more of Rostand, but not a different Rostand. It was not in him to change the nature of his endeavor, as Ibsen changed the quality

and purpose of his work when he was over fifty. Rostand left behind him a very beautiful play, "*La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan*." Since he had to die, I am very glad that he lived long enough to see the flag of France flying on the ramparts of the Rhine.

Now I shall take up, one by one, his half a dozen plays and say a few words about each of them in turn.

His first play, "*Les Romanesques*," was produced in 1894, when the author was twenty-six years old. The title means, in English, "*The Story-Book People*"; and the general stage direction reads as follows,—"*The action happens wherever you wish, provided that the costumes are pretty.*" A rather good beginning,—don't you think? When the curtain rises, we find ourselves in a garden divided into two by a wall down the center of the stage. On the top of the wall, a very young man is sitting. On the other side of the wall, a very young girl is standing on a bench. They look a little like figurines in Dresden China. A large book is held open in the young man's lap, and he is reading aloud. He is reading a lyric love scene from an old romantic play, called "*Romeo and Juliet*." We soon find out that these young people are very romantic, that they are in love with each other, and that the only thing that thwarts their love is the prosaic fact that their fathers are next door neighbors and fast friends. How terrible it is that there should be nothing to keep them apart! So their fathers, knowing this, have to pretend to quarrel with each other. When their fathers apparently fall out, the young lovers are de-

lighted. It would now be logical for them to elope; so, with the aid of a sympathetic character called Straforel, they arrange to run away. Straforel is a professional caterer in elopements. He will get up any kind of elopement that you wish,—first class, or second class, or third class. You may elope without a carriage, or you may have a carriage with one horse, or two horses, *et cetera*, according to your tastes. The young people have a perfectly delightful time arranging an elopement with all the trimmings. Then, unfortunately, they make the tragic discovery that their fathers are not enemies at all; and, of course, there is nothing they can do but part forever. How could they possibly go on loving each other without an impediment?

That is an outline of the first act; and, if I had the time to review the three acts of "Les Romanesques," I don't think I could give you any better idea of the composition. It is as light as thistledown. The only possible reason for writing such a piece would be the fun of writing it with faultless art; for perfect literary craftsmanship is its own excuse for being. I have said that Rostand had no predecessors; but if, perchance, the planet Venus twinkled when "Les Romanesques" was written, it may have been because Alfred de Musset was up there, smiling, and throwing little sidelong glances down with understanding eyes.

Rostand's next undertaking was a little more substantial, for he was growing more mature. He was

twenty-seven years old when Sarah Bernhardt produced "La Princesse Lointaine" in 1895. I suppose you are familiar with the legend of Rudel and the lady of Tripoli,—at least from Browning's poem. The troubadour, Rudel, has fallen profoundly in love, by hearsay, with the lady Mélissinde, a princess of the East, who is reputed to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Anybody, according to Rudel, can fall in love with a woman who is thrust upon him by propinquity,—whom he can see and listen to and touch,—but it takes a poet to fall in love with a woman he has never seen; and, while he is about it, he might just as well fall in love with the most beautiful woman in the world. But Rudel falls very ill; and, when he is sick nigh unto death, he thinks that he would like to see the lady of his love before he dies. So he organizes an expedition to sail for Tripoli; and they start out in a gorgeous caravel. He takes along with him many other knights and troubadours and gentlemen,—among them his dearest friend, Bertrand D'Allamanon. After many hardships, they come in sight of land. By that time, Rudel is so ill that he begs his friend, Bertrand, to go ashore and call upon the princess and convey to her his own poetic messages of love. Now, the lady of Tripoli had heard of the troubadour Rudel and had read the poems he had written to her. When his ship appears, she is naturally interested; and when Bertrand comes ashore, looking very young and very handsome, she at once assumes that he is the troubadour,—par-

ticularly since, at the first sight of her, he drops to his knees and recites a set of verses that Rudel had written to her overseas. So she falls in love with him at once, assuming that he is Rudel; and Bertrand falls in love with her. Here, then, we have a strong dramatic situation; for Bertrand, acting as an emissary of his best friend, has fallen in love with the lady that his best friend has long adored, while his best friend is lying at the point of death. It is a situation that calls for an heroic exercise of the obsolescent poetry of gentlemanliness. This play has nothing to do with the nineteenth century and still less with the twentieth. It has nothing to do with anything that seems important to most people at the present time. But it has picturesqueness, it has charm, it has the forlorn loveliness of longing for ideals long ago and far away.

It contains one song of which I am particularly fond,—the song of the troubadour Rudel to his princess far away; and, because I like this song, I am going to read it to you,—for love of lovely words. It may be that some of you do not understand the French language. I am sorry for you if you don't; but, in this case, it does not matter at all. The value of this song is in its sound. Its meaning is comparatively immaterial; but, if you insist on knowing what it means, the general sense of it is that anybody can love a light-haired girl or a dark-haired girl or a red-haired girl if she is around all the time, but it takes a poet to love a girl he has never seen. But this is how it sounds:

C'est chose bien commune  
 De soupirer pour une  
 Blonde, châtaine ou brune  
     Maîtresse,  
 Lorsque brune, châtaine,  
 Ou blonde, on l'a sans peine.  
 —Moi, j'aime la lointaine  
     Princesse!

C'est chose bien peu belle  
 D'être longtemps fidèle,  
 Lorsqu'on peut baiser d'Elle,  
     La traine,  
 Lorsque parfois on presse  
 Une main, qui se laisse . . .  
 Moi, j'aime la Princesse  
     Lointaine!

Car c'est chose suprême  
 D'aimer sans qu'on vous aime,  
 D'aimer toujours, quand même,  
     Sans cesse,  
 D'une amour incertaine,  
 Plus noble d'être vaine . . .  
 Et j'aime la lointaine  
     Princesse!

Car c'est chose divine,  
 D'aimer lorsqu'on devine,  
 Rêve, invente, imagine  
     A peine . . .  
 Le seul rêve intéresse,  
 Vivre sans rêve, qu'est-ce?  
 Et j'aime la Princesse  
     Lointaine!

Rostand's next piece of work was "La Samaritaine," —"The Woman of Samaria,"—which was produced by Sarah Bernhardt in 1897. If the lyricism of "La Princesse Lointaine" is like the music of harps in the air, the graver music of "La Samaritaine" is like the



throbbing of some vast cathedral organ that shakes you into sanctity. The author did not call this piece "a play in three acts"; he called it "a sermon in three pictures." It is a very simple thing. The leading figures are Jesus and the woman of Samaria. In the first act, the woman of Samaria encounters Jesus at a wayside well and is converted to become one of His followers. In the second act, she goes forth and gathers a large crowd to listen to Him. And, in the third act, Jesus talks to the crowd that she has gathered. "La Samaritaine" seems to me one of the most beautiful and one of the most effective presentations of the character of Jesus that have been written in any literature. The part of Jesus is a long part in the play; but the character is never made to say anything whatever that is not recorded in at least one of the four gospels. The selected sayings are assembled with such exquisite art and the part is written with such serene poetic beauty that I sincerely think that the presentation of the character of Jesus in "La Samaritaine" is more effective than the presentation of the same character in the French translations of the Bible. Of course, "La Samaritaine" was not intended as a theatrical play; it was prepared for special performances at Eastertide. From the poetic point of view, however, it is perhaps the loftiest of Rostand's compositions; for not elsewhere has he risen to that serene simplicity which, in this instance, was required of him by his lofty theme.

Not many years ago, "La Samaritaine" was pre-



sented in this country by Sarah Bernhardt; and, at that time, it was taken to the city of Philadelphia. The performance was forbidden by the police, and the actors were threatened with arrest. The city of Philadelphia, in those days, was noted for its saloons, its gambling halls, its prize-fights, and the open-armed hospitality of its houses of ill-fame; but it was shocked at the idea of a public exhibition of a sermon on the stage. Of course, "La Samaritaine" was not written for an uncivilized public. It was written for the citizens of France.

It was as a result of these achievements that Rostand received an opportunity to write "Cyrano de Bergerac." I speak of it in terms of opportunity; because this play would never have been undertaken had it not been for the advice and assistance and collaboration of a great actor, the late Constant Coquelin. Coquelin, the greatest comedian of his time and one of the great comedians of all time, perceived that Rostand had the necessary talent for writing an heroic comedy: so he sent for the young poet and said to him, "I have come to that point in my career when I would like to have a great acting part, as great an acting part as Hamlet, a part that will permit me in a single evening to do all that I can do. The only trouble is that I can do nearly everything. I am primarily a comedian, and of course you must give me an opportunity to play all kinds of comedy,—humorous, witty, satirical, extravagant, grotesque, buffoon. But I am also a poetic actor. I have a great voice, and I can read. I can even make

love; and then, too, I am one of the few comedians who can die." So they sought for a part that would permit this versatile actor to do everything in his repertoire,—to make love, to be poetical, to be gallant, to fight a duel, to play a battle scene, to die, and every now and then to chant bravura passages in that incomparable voice of his; and they hit upon the historical character of Cyrano de Bergerac, who had actually lived in the days of Molière.

The point that interested Rostand particularly was that Cyrano had an enormous nose which gave him a grotesque appearance, while at the same time he had the soul of a poet. The idea of a man who was very beautiful inside and not at all beautiful on the outside was a fascinating idea to Rostand, because it seemed to him typical of life at large. All of us, I think, have some beauty hidden inside of us that is not visible to the eyes of those who look upon us from the outside.

The play was worked out in constant consultation with Coquelin; and this collaboration, doubtless, helped to make it the perfect piece of theatrical craftsmanship that it unquestionably is. I know of other plays that may be greater, but I know of none more perfectly planned or more perfectly written. If a messenger should suddenly descend from Mars and ask me to explain to him in a single evening what the theatre meant on earth, I think that I should take him to a performance of "Cyrano de Bergerac."

When this play was first produced at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin on the twenty-eighth of December, 1897, it took Paris by storm. I was in this country at that time; and I remember that, when the first rumors came overseas, within a week or two, they were to the effect that a comparatively unknown poet, only twenty-nine years of age, had actually written the greatest play in the history of the world. I do not think that "Cyrano" is that, because I have seen "Othello" and I have seen "The Trojan Women." But no other play in history has been so immediately and so enormously successful in every country of the world. I think the reason for this is that the play has certain qualities which are exceedingly contagious to the audience and which everybody in the audience desires to have stimulated within himself. It has beauty, it has gallantry, it has love, it has satire, it has bravery, it has humor, it has pathos. And I think that the average auditor, catching these qualities by contagion, finds it very easy to identify himself with Cyrano de Bergerac and to experience vicariously, within himself, what is shown upon the stage. Cyrano does and says what all of us would like to do and say, what all of us in our dreams have always done and said. And his passion for the beautiful gesture is so gallant and so glorious and so young! Those critics who would have us think that literature, to be impressive, must be doleful might dismiss "Cyrano de Bergerac" as immature; but I think that youth perhaps is more important than maturity.

Of course, if we should take the fable very seriously, I am afraid that we could not deny that Cyrano is guilty of the sin, or I might even call it the crime, of self-sacrifice. I call self-sacrifice a crime; for, if we have learned anything at all in the present stage of the universe, we have learned that the primary object of life is not self-sacrifice but self-fulfillment. It is the duty of every individual in the world to contribute to the general furtherance of the evolution of the universe by developing himself to the utmost possible degree to which that self of his may be developed; and anybody who sacrifices himself, and by such spiritual suicide stints the general cause of evolution, is obviously guilty of a crime,—one of the most regrettable crimes in the world. Now, Cyrano is guilty of the crime of self-sacrifice. He gives up his own love as hopeless, and conspires to marry off the lady that he loves to an empty-headed gallant with a pretty face, thereby consigning her to a life of misery, in order that he himself may enjoy the luxurious agony of his gesture of unselfishness. With my philosophic mind, I think that that is a dastardly thing to do; yet Cyrano is applauded in the theatre for this very deed, and I must admit that I applaud him with the rest. Why do we applaud self-sacrifice? It is because our emotions have evolved more slowly than our intelligence. For two thousand years, self-sacrifice has been preached throughout the occidental world as a virtue; it has even been recommended as a duty; and though, with our intellects, we may know better and think otherwise,

we cannot rescue our emotions from that ancestral heritage of superstition.

I should like to add that I never fully realized the perfect craftsmanship of "Cyrano de Bergerac" until I was associated with Mr. Walter Hampden in the rehearsals of the current reproduction. We had the advantage of working with a great translation. "Great" is an adjective that I use very sparingly; but I think that it may justly be applied to Mr. Brian Hooker's new version of "Cyrano" in English verse. Professor Brander Matthews put the matter perfectly when he said, "It is utterly impossible to translate 'Cyrano de Bergerac' into English verse; and Brian Hooker has done it." Mr. Hooker followed the original text speech for speech and line for line; he omitted nothing; and, when we had the play in rehearsal, we saw that it was at least twenty minutes too long. For the convenience of prospective patrons who would have to catch the last train to Montclair or New Rochelle, we had to take out lines here and there, cheating a little where we hoped the cheat would not be noticed, in order to save that twenty minutes; but it was a heart-breaking task, as if a surgeon had been called upon to amputate a little finger of his best beloved child. We discovered that the entire text was woven like a piece of tapestry; and, when we tried to cut out a little speech, we not only made a hole in the fabric, but everything around the hole began to unravel. At the next rehearsal, I could seldom hear anything except the lines we had left out. I have been

through the rehearsals of many plays, including half a dozen of my own; and "Cyrano" is the only play that seemed to bleed wherever it was cut.

Rostand's next play, "L'Aiglon," was also intended, at the outset, as a vehicle for Coquelin. The great comedian had always wanted to play a Napoleonic grenadier,—a grouchy old soldier with a great moustache; and the poet started out from a central conception of the character of Flambeau. But before long the dramatist encountered a great difficulty. He came to Coquelin and said, "Your character of the grumpy old grenadier is coming along all right; but the trouble is with Napoleon. As soon as he steps upon the stage, nobody will look at anybody else, not even at you." Of course that has always been the difficulty in any play in which Napoleon has figured. The reason is that Napoleon himself was the best theatricist in history and one of the best dramatists. All you have to do to appreciate that quality of his is to go to his tomb and read the inscription around it, which was written by himself. I am neither a soldier nor a statesman and I haven't any critical opinion of Napoleon's prowess in either of those capacities; but I know a prose sentence when I hear one, and I insist upon saluting a man who could write an epitaph like this: "*Je désire que mes cendres reposent sur les bords de la Seine, au milieu de ce peuple français que j'ai tant aimé.*" So Coquelin said to Rostand, "The only thing to do is to kill the Emperor off and set your play after he is dead. If you lay your scene after the



death of Napoleon, I, the old soldier, will be loyal to his memory."

So Rostand set to work a second time, setting the play in the period of Napoleon's insignificant little son. He conceived a sort of "Hamlet,"—a play about a young man overcome with the burden of circumstances inherited from his father and feeling himself unable to cope with them. But, after a time, the poet came to Coquelin again and said: "It is worse than ever now; nobody will look at you; because that frail little boy in his white uniform is such an appealing figure that, whenever he comes upon the stage, everybody's heart goes out to him." So Coquelin, still longing to play his grouchy old soldier with the great moustache, regretfully conceded that the project was impossible. "Take the piece to Sarah," he said, "she's just played Hamlet and wants to do another boy."

The great thing about "L'Aiglon" is the completeness with which it quintessentializes the Napoleonic period. When people like Mr. H. G. Wells discover history, they usually like to throw out their chests and hurl mud at Napoleon. The gesture makes them feel important. But men like Rostand have written poems about Napoleon; and I don't think that any one will ever write a poem about Mr. H. G. Wells. The briefest way for me to indicate to you the spirit of "L'Aiglon" is merely to read you the dedication of the play. It is written in a single sentence of prose; but if you have ears to hear, this sentence will march into your heart like an army with banners: "A mon fils

Maurice, et à la mémoire de son héroïque arrière-grand-père Maurice, comte Gérard, Maréchal de France."

I find, to my regret, that I have left myself no time for an adequate discussion of Rostand's next and final play, "Chantecler." The author took ten years to write this piece; and it is not a thing to be disposed of in a moment. "Chantecler," like "Cyrano," was written for Coquelin. By his intimate friends, the great actor was always called "Coq"; and it happened that that diminutive coincided with the French word for rooster. It was from this suggestion that Rostand conceived his fantastic idea of the magnified barnyard. The cock, as you know, is the symbol of France; and it was quite natural to imagine Coquelin playing a rooster, which would be at once a symbol of France, and a symbol of the artist, and a symbol of the human soul. "Chantecler" failed in the theatre, because Coquelin died before it was produced, and Guitry, though an admirable actor, was not equal to the leading part. But I fear that it might have failed anyway, because it was too intricately clever. The author devoted too much time to the task of writing it; and the workmanship is so brilliant and so amazing that one can hardly see the forest for the trees.

And now, before I let you go, I want to allow Rostand himself to do the last of the talking; and, to this end, I shall close by reading you a sonnet that he wrote while the Huns were expressing themselves by bombarding the Cathedral of Rheims. It seems to me the

finest of the poems inspired by the war, because it is the most civilized; and, though I doubt if Mr. Edward Bok would pay me a prize of fifty thousand dollars for the suggestion, I think that the peace of the world might be assured if every child in every school of Germany could be required to learn this sonnet by heart and to recite it once a day for the next twenty-five years. There is no hate in the poem, no anger, not even any indignation; there is nothing but a smiling pity.

## LA CATHÉDRALE

Ils n'ont fait que la rendre un peu plus immortelle.  
L'Œuvre ne périt pas, que futile un gredin.  
Demande à Phidias et demande à Rodin  
Si, devant ses morceaux, on ne dit plus: "C'est Elle!"

La Forteresse meurt quand on la démantèle,  
Mais le Temple, brisé, vit plus noble; et soudain  
Les yeux, se souvenant du toit avec dédain,  
Préfèrent voir le ciel dans la pierre en dentelle.

Rendons grace—attendu qu'il nous manquait encor  
D'avoir ce qu'ont les Grecs sur la colline d'or:  
Le Symbole du Beau consacré par l'insulte!—  
Rendons grace aux pointeurs du stupide canon,  
Puisque de leur adresse allemande il résulte  
Une Honte pour eux, pour nous un Parthénon.

### THIRD LECTURE

## GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

FEBRUARY 25, 1924

BECAUSE of the conspicuous success of "Saint Joan" at the Garrick Theatre, it has been suggested that I talk to you this morning about the work of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

For some reason or other, I missed the first performance of this latest play of his; and, since I have grown of late a little lazy in my theatre-going, I did not get around to it until last week, when it became desirable that I should see it if I were to talk about it this morning. I say "desirable"; but I do not say "necessary." I am quite sure that I could have talked about "Saint Joan" without having seen it; for the mind of Mr. Shaw is thoroughly consistent, and anybody who knows his mind can always predict in advance exactly what he is going to say about a particular subject. In the early days of August, 1914, I predicted that Mr. Shaw would argue that England was just as wrong in defending the neutrality of Belgium as Germany was in violating it; and, surely enough, Mr. Shaw came forward with such a statement within a week or two. He wasn't going to let anybody get away with the old-fashioned idea that right is right and wrong is wrong.

Although I did not see "Saint Joan" until last Tuesday night, I knew in advance what Mr. Shaw would think of Joan of Arc. I knew the sort of play that he would write on this subject; and for that reason I did not believe any of the reviews of "Saint Joan" that I had read. And, though it is more blessed to praise than to condemn, I hope that you will not be misled by the laudatory tone of these reviews. "Saint Joan" is a poor play. It is almost unpardonably poor; for it would seem that any dramatist endowed with such remarkable ability as Mr. Shaw has frequently exhibited on past occasions ought to have been able to make a more impressive thing out of a dramatization of the character of one of the most appealing figures in all history. I was not surprised to find the composition tedious, for Mr. Shaw has grown garrulous in recent years; but I was a little surprised to find that long passages of it were dull, and I was actually astonished to discover that the piece never reached a point which aroused the spectator to that emotional enthusiasm and spiritual elevation which, obviously, are inherent in the theme. Mr. Shaw gave himself plenty of time. The play occupies nearly three hours and a half. And it seems to me a little difficult to imagine how any dramatist of notable ability could talk three hours and a half about Joan of Arc, of all people, without ever calling tears into the eyes. I don't mean tears of sadness; I mean tears of enthusiasm. There is nothing more moving in the world than the spectacle of many people paying tribute to

one. Suppose there is a parade upon the avenue and that some hero [if only a hero of the moment] rides down the street on horseback. Of course the hero ought to look heroic: he should have the proper make-up for the part, as General Pershing has, for instance. Then, when the crowd cheers, a lump will gather in your throat. Now, there is in all history no more appealing figure than the Maid of France. Multitudes have paid tribute to her, throughout uncounted generations. She incorporates, and has incorporated for six hundred years, the soul of a nation, the most gallant nation in the world. It is inconceivable that she could ride down the street on horseback without bringing tears to the eyes. But, at Mr. Shaw's play, you sit and listen to her for three hours and never even care.

Of course this paradox arises from the analytic method of Mr. Shaw. Instead of writing history, he has written a criticism of history. Instead of writing biography, he has written a criticism of biography. Instead of creating a character, he has written a criticism of the character. He has written a treatise on Joan of Arc instead of writing Joan of Arc.

When you saw this play, I wonder if you realized what a bad part Mr. Shaw has written for his leading actress. Here is the central part in an historical drama, the title part of the play, a part supposed to represent one of the greatest figures in all history: and what is the actress asked to do?—Talk; and nothing else. I watched the part very carefully; and I



think that I am right in saying that, during the entire evening of three hours and a half, the actress impersonating Joan of Arc is given only one piece of stage business to do. In the trial scene, she is allowed to read a paper that she has signed under duress and to tear it to pieces. Once or twice, during the course of the play, she kneels down and gets up again. Otherwise, she is given nothing whatever to do but stand around and read lines. Miss Winifred Lenihan, who plays the part at the Garrick Theatre, complains that many of these lines are out of character. She says that just as she is about to realize within her own imagination the mood of Joan of Arc and to communicate it by contagion to the audience, Mr. Shaw makes her say something which disrupts the mood and shatters the illusion. This is sound criticism. But, even if many of the lines were not annoyingly out of character, it would be difficult for any actress to suggest the Maid of Orléans without the aid of any action whatsoever. For the historical Joan of Arc led a very active life. She did things; and she got things done. Her public career lasted only about a year, and she was a very, very busy person in the time allotted to her. She was not a talkative person; she was not a reflective person; she was not an analytic person. She was not interested in reasons but solely in results. The only right way to represent her on the stage would be to show her doing something all the time. She should have at least as much to do as Rostand's gallant hero, Cyrano de Bergerac. Cyrano does a good deal of

talking, but, through it all, he is always doing something.

In "Saint Joan" we are told that, off-stage and between scenes, the heroine has accomplished this or that; but we do not see her accomplish it. We are told that she has won a battle here or there; but we are never taken to the battle. We are told that she has been captured by the enemy; but we do not see her captured. Whenever in history she did anything that was dramatic, that something is left off the stage. We are allowed to come along a week afterward and listen to Mr. Shaw while he delivers a lecture about it. Is that a great way to dramatize a great historic theme? I do not think so.

Nobody else in the play has anything to do but talk; yet the piece is supposed to represent a savage century of history when people acted first and thought afterwards, if ever. They did not sit around and argue or philosophize. They sprang to horse and went out and cut each other's throats. Imagine what Shakespeare would have done with such a period. The stage would have been noisy with alarums and excursions, the hurrying hither and thither of armed men. There would have been battle scenes, as in "Henry V.": "Once more into the breach!" . . . There would have been something to get enthusiastic about. Yet, at Mr. Shaw's play, you sit unmoved for three hours and a half and are not even made to care about France.

Many of the conversations are interesting in their

way. Of course, they are studded with anachronisms: and I do not mean anachronisms of fact, I mean anachronisms of idea: but it is rather amusing to hear a fifteenth century personage uttering ideas that did not become current in the world until after 1918. The Bishop of Beauvais is a very able conversationalist: he is Mr. Shaw talking about a period of history. The inquisitor, however, is too loquacious to be interesting after the first three or four minutes of his lengthy lecture. The trial scene, which is the one scene the audience has been waiting for and really wants to see, is ruined by the interminable talk of the inquisitor before Joan is brought upon the stage. The auditors are so tired of the trial by that time that they no longer care whether she is burned or not. Then, after the play is over, the author appends an epilogue, in which he discusses his historical material again. He now writes a criticism of what he has already written,—a criticism of a criticism.

I am informed in print by my friend and colleague, Mr. Heywood Broun, that "Saint Joan" is the finest play that has been written in the English language within the limits of his memory. I don't know how far back his memory extends, nor when he lost it; but I should think it ought to go back to "Mid-Channel" and "The Thunderbolt," "A Kiss for Cinderella" and "What Every Woman Knows," "Strife," "The Playboy of the Western World," "The Gods of the Mountain," or at least to "Anna Christie" and "Beyond the Horizon." If "Saint Joan" is a finer play than

any of these, I shall have to shoot myself before next Monday morning; for it would be presumptuous of me to appear before you once again to talk to you about the drama.

"Saint Joan" was immediately successful at the box-office. It was praised in superlative terms by most of the reviewers. The public goes to see it, is bored, and is afraid to say so. It is a popular play, because there is nothing more potent in the theatre than fashion. I received a letter a few months ago from Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, who is now seventy-two years old, in which he said that more and more as time went on he became convinced that vogue counted more than anything else for momentary success in the theatre. Mr. Bernard Shaw became the fashion a few years ago,—after he had ceased to write good plays. His name is very valuable in the theatre, because the American public is more impressed by a successful name than by an anonymous work of worthy art. As an illustration of this fact, you might look any month at the cover of the "Cosmopolitan Magazine."

But let us not forget that Mr. Shaw wrote "Candida," and several other worthy plays, before he became a fashionable dramatist with a successful name. Let us now review his career and remind ourselves of the dominant characteristics of his mind.

Mr. Shaw was born in 1856 and is now sixty-eight years old, or thereabouts. He was born in Dublin of a middle-class Protestant family. His father, a minor government official, was an unsuccessful man. Mr.

Shaw's mother, however, was a woman of unusual ability,—a skilled musician, who had also a keen knowledge of the other arts. She became a teacher of music and thereby helped to support her husband and her son. Mr. Shaw went to school in the ordinary way; but he has said that his years in school were the most utterly wasted of his life. In his teens, he went to work in the office of a land agent and tried to help support his mother. Upon the death of his father, Mr. Shaw's mother moved to London; and her son followed her at the age of twenty.

During the next nine years, from the age of twenty to the age of twenty-nine, Mr. Shaw was exceedingly poor. He devoted himself to literary work; and, since he had no money, he was obliged to live on a small allowance from his mother. He wrote assiduously and constantly for nine years; and, during this total period, he tells us that he earned exactly six pounds by the product of his pen. Thirty dollars in nine years! This period had a strong effect upon the development of his habits and his tastes. Largely because of his extreme poverty, he adopted in his early twenties an exceedingly abstemious routine of life; and, since he is the sort of man who intellectualizes his own habits into principles, he has preached abstemiousness ever since. He does not eat meat, he does not smoke tobacco, he does not drink liquor; and he gets up early in the morning. These habits, as I say, he has retained throughout his years of affluence; and, transmuting them to principles, he would impose them

upon others. He says that everybody ought to live on lettuce and nuts and early morning air. Everybody ought to go without meat, without drink, without tobacco. When people protest against such abnormality, Mr. Shaw argues that he himself is a thoroughly normal person and that everybody else is abnormal.

During his twenties, Mr. Shaw wrote three clever novels which attracted no attention at the time, though in later years they were republished with some degree of success; but he did not seem to be getting anywhere. But at the age of twenty-nine a great change came in his career. He met Mr. William Archer. At that time Mr. William Archer was the foremost dramatic critic in the English language. He had discovered Ibsen. He had introduced Ibsen's plays to English readers. It was Mr. Archer who suggested to Mr. Shaw that, instead of writing novels that nobody wanted to read, he should seek a regular job as a critic for some periodical. It happened that Mr. Shaw's mind was particularly suited to the task of criticism; and he soon became a very able critical reviewer. For several years he served on the staff of the "Saturday Review," writing not only dramatic criticism but also criticism of music and painting. He knew a great deal about music, which he had learned from his mother; he knew something about painting; he knew a little about the drama; and he wrote very cleverly about all three. As a dramatic critic he was not so philosophical as Mr. Archer nor so unprejudiced, not so sound nor



so safely to be depended on; but he was much more brilliant and more keen.

It was Mr. Archer, also, who suggested that Mr. Shaw should try his hand at a play. The two critics collaborated, and started to write a piece called "Widowers' Houses"; but they laid it aside for some reason or other when they had written only an act, and Mr. Archer ultimately lost interest in it. Subsequently, however, Mr. Shaw finished it up alone; and "Widowers' Houses" became the first of his dramatic compositions. Soon afterward he wrote "The Philanderer" and "Mrs. Warren's Profession." In the middle of his thirties, he was still a dramatic critic trying to write plays; and his plays, interesting as they were, were obviously written by a critic.

I have said already that his mind has not changed since his twenties, although of course it has developed. He began life as a critic. He wrote his early plays as a critic. And he is still writing plays as a critic. He is always criticizing his subject-matter; and his art is a "criticism of life" in a sense much narrower than that intended by Matthew Arnold when he coined that famous phrase.

Mr. Shaw's early plays were produced only privately, when they were produced at all; and again he did not seem to be getting anywhere. Then he conceived a clever idea and did what, at the time, was an extraordinary thing. He decided to publish his plays, accompanied by critical prefaces which should assure

the public that his plays were masterpieces. If Mr. Shaw had invented nothing else, he would deserve a place in history as the inventor of the habit of self-advertising which has become so fashionable among the writers of the present day. At the time when Mr. Shaw conceived this clever idea, the publication of English plays was utterly uncustomary; indeed, for a long time, because of defective copyright legislation, it had been impossible for English authors to publish their plays without losing control of the acting rights. This situation was remedied at the outset of the eighteen-nineties; but, by continuance of an established custom, the plays of such successful dramatists as Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones were printed only for the use of the actors and of course were printed in the shorthand of the stage. Then along came Mr. Shaw, announcing himself as a literary dramatist. He scarcely needed to prove his point; for there were his books to prove it for him. The public got an idea that his plays must be literature because they were bound in cloth and sold for two dollars; whereas, obviously, the plays of Pinero and Jones could not be literature, because they were issued in paper covers and sold for fifty cents. To this day, that prejudice exists; and, for many years, there was a doubt in many minds about the literary value of the plays of J. M. Barrie, until the author at last permitted them to appear in print.

The early plays of Mr. Shaw, however literary they might seem upon the printed page, did contain a num-

ber of excellent acting parts; and this fact was first discovered by a great American actor. Richard Mansfield discovered "Arms and the Man" shortly after it was published, and produced the play in this country in 1894. This was the first important production of any play of Mr. Shaw's anywhere in the world; and the author had, at that time, already reached the age of thirty-eight. "Arms and the Man" was only mildly successful; but three years later, in 1897, Mr. Mansfield produced "The Devil's Disciple," with more fortunate results. Mr. Mansfield also put into rehearsal the play called "Candida," but abandoned it because he found that the part of Marchbanks was not suited to him. Perhaps it would have been more fair to the author if I had said that the actor was not suited to the part; but, at any rate, the two were incompatible. Thus far, Mr. Shaw had accomplished nothing whatsoever in the theatre of London; and nothing further happened to him in the American theatre until the play called "Candida" was produced in 1903.

This production, from the practical point of view, marked the turning point in Mr. Shaw's career. An exceedingly able, but at that time comparatively unknown, actor happened to "see himself"—as theatre people say—in the rôle of the young poet, Marchbanks. His name was Arnold Daly. He wanted to play that part; but, of course, no manager would let him. In the first place, no manager, in those days of the star system, believed that an unknown actor could carry a play to success; and in the second place, since the

play had been published as literature, the managers were sure that there must be something the matter with it. So Mr. Daly, rebuffed at every turn, decided that he would have to do the play himself, although his capital amounted to little more than a hundred dollars. Fortunately, "Candida," though a hard play to act, was a very easy play to put on. It required only a single simple set, which could be borrowed from a scenic storehouse; and, in those days, it was possible to hire a small theatre for a couple of matinée performances at a very small expense. Also, Mr. Daly was able to persuade some of his friends to play the other parts without salary; and they got together and rehearsed,—Dorothy Donnelly as Candida, Dodson Mitchell as Morell, Ernest Lawford as Lexy, Louise Closser Hale as Prossie, and Herbert Standing as Candida's father. Nevertheless, this dauntless little band of players discovered that they would need two or three hundred dollars more to place "Candida" before the public; and Mr. Daly had to hunt up a friend who had two hundred dollars and take him into partnership. This friend, also, was an inconspicuous actor that nobody had ever heard of. His name was Winchell Smith.

They produced "Candida" at a special matinée in 1902; and it made a sensation. At first it was played for two or three matinées a week, at one theatre after another; then it got into an evening bill and ran successfully for weeks and months. It established the fame of Mr. Shaw as a practical playwright and de-

stroyed the managerial superstition that his plays were too literary to be popular. Also, this production achieved a great deal of notoriety for Mr. Arnold Daly, and ruined him for life. He is an admirable actor; but he has never been the same since. Mr. Winchell Smith was affected somewhat otherwise. He took to writing plays; and he is now a millionaire. When Mr. Daly, as a result of the initial run of "Candida," found himself in possession of the price of a steamer ticket, he sailed to England to see Mr. Shaw. Mr. Shaw and Mr. Daly got along very well together, because each of them admitted that both of them were geniuses; and the actor came back to New York and produced several Shaw plays in quick succession,— "The Man of Destiny," "How He Lied to Her Husband," "You Never Can Tell," and "Mrs. Warren's Profession." "Mrs. Warren" was pulled by the police; and that was an excellent ad for both the actor and the author.

In due time, all this was heard about in London; and it occurred to a very bright young man over there that he might do, three or four years afterward, what Mr. Daly had already done. So he hunted up a partner, and hired a theatre, and produced several plays of Mr. Shaw's. He acted the chief parts himself and directed the performances. The name of this young man was Mr. Granville Barker. It was he who made Mr. Shaw successful on the boards of London; and it was this accomplishment that started him on his own remarkable career.

About the same time, Mr. Shaw was discovered in Germany. They liked him very much in Germany, and they still like him very much, because, like the Prussian military leaders, he is entirely intelligent and thoroughly destructive. Also, he tells them frankly that he is better than Shakespeare; and in Germany the people like to know whom to salute.

Mr. Shaw's early plays were all pretty good, and some of them were very good. Make no mistake about that,—even if you *have* just seen "Saint Joan"! I think that "Candida"—which I still regard as the masterpiece of Mr. Shaw—is a great play; and you will remember that "great" is an adjective which I very rarely use. "The Devil's Disciple" is a very good play; so is "Cæsar and Cleopatra"; so is "Man and Superman." So, also, are several of the one-act plays,—notably, "The Showing-Up of Blanco Posnet." When you see Mr. Shaw's bad plays, like "Heartbreak House" or "Back to Methuselah," don't allow yourself to be prejudiced against him. Remember that he used to write good plays,—before he became too proud to write.

The trouble with him, in his later years, arises from the fact that he attained his popular success in a peculiar way. He became successful by gathering around himself a special audience; and that was bad for him. I remember a conversation on the subject of Mr. Shaw that I happened to have in the year 1910 with Sir Arthur Pinero. Mr. Shaw had just written a couple of appallingly bad plays, which had failed in London,



—although, later, they made a little money in the United States. These plays were called "Getting Married" and "Misalliance." "Getting Married" is bad enough; but "Misalliance" is one of the worst plays that have been written within the limits of my memory,—and my memory is more extensive than that of Mr. Heywood Broun. I asked Sir Arthur Pinero what was the matter with Mr. Shaw; and Sir Arthur answered, "He is being hampered by a special audience that always expects him to do the unexpected. He ought to produce a play anonymously. Then he could get rid of his special audience and appeal to the entire public." That is precisely what Mr. Shaw did the following season. He wrote a good play and produced it anonymously; and it achieved a notable success. It was called, you will remember, "Fanny's First Play"; and it was written in the old-fashioned manner of his earlier compositions. "Androcles and the Lion," two years later, was another fine piece of work; but, after that, Mr. Shaw turned lazy again; and, in his later years, he has not bothered to build plays but has merely written reams and reams of endless dialogue.

The work of Mr. Bernard Shaw may, and must, be criticized from two totally different points of view. He must be studied as a playwright, and he must be studied as a propagandist; for he does not write plays for the sake of writing plays but for the sake of propaganda. In his youth, he joined the Fabian Society,—an organization to further the amelioration of

social conditions by enlightened legislation. He became a cart-tail orator in Hyde Park; and he has never lost the habit of using the stage as a cart-tail. Thus, people who do not admire his prowess as a dramatist may enjoy his subject-matter, and other people who are bored by his subject-matter may admire his prowess as a dramatist.

For convenience, I shall first set aside his subject-matter and consider him solely as a playwright; and I shall examine his work as a playwright from the point of view of construction, from the point of view of characterization, and from the point of view of writing.

As a builder of plays, Mr. Shaw has demonstrated a genuine ability, whenever he has not been too lazy or too proud to demonstrate it. He began by pouring new wine into old bottles. What he had to say was new, but his technical formula was old. In his early pieces, he followed the traditional and conventional pattern of the well-made play. From the technical point of view, it might be said that his first half dozen plays were patterned in the manner of T. W. Robertson. The ideas were novel, the characters were unusual, but the technical method was Robertsonian. "Candida" might be described as a Robertson play written by another mind,—a keener and more brilliant mind than Robertson's. For instance, the bibulous father of the heroine is introduced solely for the sake of comic relief. I have never believed that he was really Candida's father; and I don't think the

author would have pretended that such a daughter could have sprung from such a parent if he had been able to think of any other way to get the comic old man into the pattern of the play. Though Mr. Shaw never rivalled Sir Arthur Pinero as a master of structural technique, he built plays soundly and built them well for many years, and showed that he had learned his job. Then, when he became a fashionable dramatist, he decided that it would look cleverer to build plays as badly as possible, and adopted the new manner of "Getting Married" and "Misalliance." He assumed, somewhat impudently, that the public and the reviewers that had praised and flattered him might not distinguish between his good plays and his bad, or, if they did distinguish, might praise the bad plays for the sake of their novelty and unconventionality; and this, in fact, was what actually happened. At his best, Mr. Shaw, as a craftsman in construction, is not nearly so able as Sir Arthur Pinero, and he is not so able as Mr. Henry Arthur Jones; but he knows enough about the subtle craft of making plays to render quite unpardonable such a shoddy piece of workmanship as "Misalliance."

Now let us turn to the second point of his technique as a playwright,—the matter of characterization. I have said already that his mind is critical rather than creative; but I trust you will regard that statement as definitive rather than condemnatory. The able critic and the able creator are really trying to accomplish the same thing. Both of them are trying to

get at the truth of life. The only difference between the creator and the critic is a difference in the direction of their thought. The critic—like Aristotle—tries to get at the truth of life by analysis,—that is, by taking the elements of life apart; and the creator—like Euripides—tries to get at the truth of life by synthesis,—that is, by putting the elements of life together. While creative dramatists—like Barrie, like Pinero, like, in his way, Mr. Galsworthy—are putting the elements of life together so that life results in living people who step forth upon the stage, Mr. Shaw pulls his puppets apart and vivisects his characters before our very eyes. Once or twice he has created a living character and has managed to leave that character alone; but very rarely. Almost never can we imagine the puppets in a Shaw play as existing beyond the limits of the play in which they figure. I have met Pinero's Iris many times in life, but I have never met any of the people of Mr. Shaw. In "Getting Married," he brings on a green-grocer, and this character is asked to describe his wife. He answers, very wittily, "She's a wonderful wife and mother. That's why all my children ran away from home." Now, as soon as he says that, we know that he is not a green-grocer. Green-grocers do not talk like that. It is the author talking, through a ventriloquial puppet. Again, in "Pygmalion," the father of the heroine is made to describe himself as "one of the undeserving poor"; but we know that people of that class do not talk that way about themselves. It is the author, writing a critical

essay on the character and putting this essay into the puppet's mouth. In "Saint Joan," time and time again, Mr. Shaw makes his heroine say things about herself that Joan of Arc could never possibly have said. Mr. Shaw can tell us all about a character; but he cannot create a character that needs no critical analysis. In particular, he cannot create women,—for other reasons that I shall come to later on.

I don't think I need say very much about the third point in Mr. Shaw's equipment as a playwright,—the matter of his writing. Everybody agrees that he is a wonderful writer of dialogue. His dialogue is very nearly as humorous as that of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones; it is very nearly as witty as that of Oscar Wilde; and it is just as clever as that of Sir Arthur Pinero. Of course, it is rhetorical and artificial; but I have never believed that it is the province of the playwright to ape the casual and formless flow of actual conversation. It is a pleasure to listen to the rhetoric of Mr. Shaw, except when he becomes too fluent and goes on for hours; and, as a talker, he enjoys the great advantage of being an Irishman.

Now, let me shift our point of view and regard Mr. Shaw, briefly, as a propagandist; for, after all, he is more interested in what he has to say than he has ever been in his medium for saying it. He is evidently quite sincere in regarding himself as a great man; but, to my mind, he seems a useful propagandist rather than an important one. If I were in great trouble and needed the advice of one of the wisest

men in the world, I don't think that I should go to Mr. Shaw.

The first habit of his mind that we may note is his habit of always allying himself with what I may call the other side of any subject. If this audience should be divided into two factions, if two hundred and fifty of you should sit on one side of the room and only fifty of you should sit on the other side, and if Mr. Shaw should enter the room, he would sit instinctively on the side of the minority. That may be because he is an Irishman. He always tries to be a champion of unpopular causes, preferably of lost causes; but he forgets that unpopular causes are sometimes—I do not say always—lost because they are wrong. If he ever found the majority on his side, he would feel so uncomfortable that he would have to change his mind. You might have thought that his instinct for the under dog would have led him, in 1914, to champion Belgium against Prussia; but he couldn't do that when all England was preparing to die upon the Belgian side. He fights for the minority not because it is right but because it is the minority.

Another habit of his mind which is only slightly different from that is his habit of telling what I may call the other half of a truth. Of course, most of the ideas and most of the principles which, in this world, are commonly accepted as true are in reality only half true; and it is greatly to the credit of Mr. Shaw that he desires always to point out the other half of the truth. But, in his application of this purpose, he



usually goes too far; he insists that his other half of the truth is the whole truth and thereby ends up with a statement that is just as false as the statement that he is combatting. Until Mr. Shaw wrote "Man and Superman," it had been traditionally assumed for several centuries that, in what used to be called the love chase of the sexes, it was the men who pursued the women. Mr. Shaw took a look at this assumption and said, in "Man and Superman,"—"Not at all! It is the women who pursue the men." Now, of course, the whole truth is that they pursue each other, running marathons around an oval track, so that it is impossible to tell which is out in front and which is hurrying after. Whenever Mr. Shaw states the other half of any truth, the sane thing to do is to add his statement to the conventional statement that he is combatting, and then divide by two.

Another habit of his mind is the habit of looking at customary things from an unc customary point of view. This is, I think, his most salutary habit. All of us are likely to cease to see anything with which our eyes have become too familiar. For more than twenty years—ever since I looked upon it first—I have wanted to own, beyond all other objects in the world, Giovanni Bellini's picture of the Madonna in the Frari Church in Venice; but, if somebody should give it to me, I suppose that, after a month or two, I should walk in and out of the room and never look at it at all. Familiarity may not breed contempt; but at least it strikes us blind. The customary things of

life, that are about us every day, are so familiar that we do not see them. The only way to make us see them is to force us to adopt an uncustomary point of view in looking at them. It occurred to Mr. Shaw that I would look once more at my Madonna of the Frari if, on entering the room some day, I should find the picture hanging upside down; and it occurred to him that, if he turned all life upside down, he would force people to see in life things that they had never seen before. Children know all about this process. Haven't you seen them bending down and looking at the world between their legs? In most of Mr. Shaw's plays, he gives us a topsy-turvy view of life. He turns the world upside down. Now, this is an illuminating process; but I think that we are likely to grow a little dizzy when it is practiced without variation.

Another habit of Mr. Shaw's is the zest with which he snaps up new ideas. He is not an original thinker; but he quickly arrays his mind with all the latest thoughts that are launched into the world. That is a dangerous thing for a dramatist to do; because a new idea is likely to wear a date upon its forehead, like the latest issue of a newspaper. Whatever is up to date to-day is likely to be out of date to-morrow. When Mr. Shaw, in a new play, deals with the latest ideas of the moment, he is often dealing with ideas that the world will have forgotten a dozen years from now. Do you remember "The Philanderer," which was written in 1893? In that play, Mr. Shaw satirized "the new woman." Do any of you now remember "the

new woman" of the eighteen-nineties,—that old-fashioned creature that the world forgot long before the war? The trouble with a number of Mr. Shaw's plays, especially with those that deal with the most advanced ideas, is that they will be obsolete in fifty years. The only way to write plays that will live a century from now is not to put into them any reference to current modes of thought. The story of *Cinderella* will be just as much alive three hundred years from now as it is to-day. It contains no political ideas, or social ideas, or religious ideas that are timely now and will be old-fashioned then. But I can't imagine any interest three hundred years from now in "John Bull's Other Island" or in "Major Barbara."

Finally, we have to note the very important fact that Mr. Shaw, in the habit of his mind, is exclusively intellectual. He seems to me to have an abnormal mind, and in a sense a monstrous mind; and the trouble with his mind is that it is excessively—and at times almost insanely—intelligent. Let us not forget the fundamental psychologic fact that the normal mind functions in three ways,—not one. It thinks with the intellect, it thrills with the sensations, and it feels with the emotions. Mr. Shaw's mind can only think. He himself has stated that he is physiologically deficient in the apparatus of sensation. Consequently he is also deficient in the capacity for emotion. What other people feel, he has to apprehend with his intelligence. It must be rather awful to have a mind that can't do anything but think; because there is nothing individual

or personal in the processes of logic. Anybody who thinks his way through the ancient syllogism, that John is mortal because all men are mortal and John is a man, arrives at the logical conclusion by the same process and has exercised no more individuality than an adding machine. The only creations of the mind that may be regarded as individual and personal achievements are the products of sensation and emotion. I am not satisfied with Descartes' syllogism, "I think: therefore I am." I believe that Descartes ought to have said, "I feel: therefore I am." The wisdom of old wives is an emotional wisdom; and so is the wisdom of all the sages of the world.

All that the intellect can do, Mr. Shaw's mind can do; but what the emotions can do is outside his element. He does not believe in anything that is not intelligent. He does not believe in religion. He does not believe in poetry. He does not believe in love. He has never experienced love in his lifetime of sixty-eight years; but he knows that the mind, under the influence of love, does not work in an intellectual manner, and he therefore dismisses love as ridiculous. From the intellectual point of view, it unquestionably is. The love scenes in the plays of Mr. Shaw are written with intelligence to show how silly the lovers are. It was not in that mood that Shakespeare wrote the balcony scene of "Romeo and Juliet." This is, of course, the main reason why Mr. Shaw cannot draw the character of women. Women, though by no means deficient in intelligence, are often more emotional than

intellectual; and that is a mood of mind that Mr. Shaw is incapable of understanding. He makes his women monsters of exaggerated intelligence.

In closing, I should like to say that it has not been my purpose to deny, nor to belittle, the extraordinary abilities of Mr. Bernard Shaw. I have sought, merely, to define them. I do not think that he is a great dramatist, because I do not think that he is a creator; but I have repeatedly admitted my admiration for his critical intelligence.

Next week—for the sake of contrast—we shall drift to the other extreme and consider the work of a dramatist who writes plays with his emotions and with no display of intelligence whatsoever. His intellect is not nearly so brilliant as that of Mr. Bernard Shaw; but he knows what every woman knows. Meanwhile, you might read over a play or two by Sir James Barrie.

#### FOURTH LECTURE

### SIR JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

MARCH 3, 1924

A WEEK ago, I analyzed the mind of Mr. Bernard Shaw and criticized his contributions to the drama. In doing so, I admitted that he is the most intelligent playwright now writing in our language and that he is endowed with one of the most brilliant intellects that are finding expression at the present time in literature. In saying this, I not only praised him but dispraised him. I emphasized what is at once his most obvious merit and also his most obvious defect. I went on to say that his mind is exclusively intellectual, that it is comparatively incapable of coping with matters of sensation or emotion, that he has to translate sensibilities and emotions into intellectual terms before his mind can deal with them, and that there is something unnatural in such a mind, something abnormal, something almost monstrous. This morning, for the sake of contrast and by way of mutual illustration, I am going to talk about the mind of Sir James Barrie, who appears to write his plays without intelligence; for, if he has an intellect and uses it, he manages to conceal the fact, like a clever woman when she manages to get around you. He is an author who is in-



terested mainly in emotions and sensibilities and who seems to address himself directly to the sensibilities and the emotions of the audience. Doubtless he knows, as well as you do, that bodies in space attract each other with a force that varies inversely as the square of the distance between them, and that  $(a+b) \times (a-b) = a^2 - b^2$ ; but you would never catch him letting on to that. But when you are planning to elope with your lady love, he will advise you that you had better wait until Saturday, because that's the day the laundry comes home.

The main reason why Mr. Shaw is overpraised at the present time—particularly by the “young intellectuals,” as I believe they call themselves—and the main reason why so little is said about the work of J. M. Barrie in the literary columns that are most fashionable at the moment, is that, for some reason or other, we have blundered into a period in which the intellect is over-honored. We appear to be living in a period when people in general think that the intellect is a very wonderful faculty, while they pay comparatively little attention to the mental accomplishments of the sensibilities and the emotions. I think that this is very unfortunate. The intellect is the most mechanical of the mental faculties and therefore, in my opinion, the least remarkable, the least wonderful, the least miraculous. Has it never occurred to you that nobody in all history has ever at any time been willing to die for an intellectual idea? People are willing to die—or to live—only for emotional ideas; and the more unrea-

sonable, the more unintelligent these ideas are, the more devotedly will people live or die for them. Can you imagine an army going forth with banners to fight for the proposition that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides? What ideas *do* men fight for?—Ideas of the sort that are sneered at by the intellectuals, ideas about home and mother, about honor, about some flag or other, about God. The only propositions men will die for are propositions that cannot be demonstrated to the intellect, propositions that cannot be proved. Men will die for Joan of Arc, men will die for Rheims Cathedral, men will die for Edith Cavell; but no man ever died for Euclid or Sir Isaac Newton. Consequently, when people devote their attention mainly to intellectual arguments, proving this and demonstrating that and ending up with a Q.E.D., it seems to me that their mental occupation is a comparatively minor one. Who would not rather have said, "Lafayette, we are here," than have been the first man in the world to prove that the whole is equal to the sum of its parts?

I am afraid that the main fault with our educational system at the present time is that it is directed too exclusively toward the development of the intellect. Of course, I have been wondering for many years what is the matter with our educational system. I remember how George Cary Eggleston used to say in his old age that he had spent four years in college and had spent the next fifty years seeking a cure for

education. I am afraid that our schools and colleges devote too much attention to the development of the intellect. I dare say that the reason why they do that is that it is comparatively easy to develop the intellect. Anybody can teach plane geometry, anybody can learn it. Anybody can demonstrate that water is composed of two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen, and anybody can acquire that item of information without imaginative effort. Things that are easy to teach and things that are easy to learn occupy most of the time in our curriculum. It seems to me that we do not devote nearly enough attention to educating and developing the sensibilities and the emotions of the growing mind. Our pupils are made to study diagrams upon a blackboard; but we do not teach them how to look through magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.

I suppose that, at this very hour, in this university, hundreds of students in hundreds of rooms are sitting like passive buckets to be pumped into—as Carlyle described the process—while scores of professors are pouring information into them. That seems to me, for the most part, a waste of time. I have never seen any reason why anybody should store his mind with information. It must occupy storage room and may possibly crowd out of the mind something else of greater value. What is the use of remembering the date when Columbus discovered America? If you ever need to know the date—to decide a bet, for instance,—you can step to the nearest encyclopedia, look

it up, write it down, and then forget it again. It's right there in the book,—available at any time. If it is in the encyclopedia, why carry it in your head? The only thing worth carrying in our head about Columbus would be something that you could not find in the encyclopedia,—whether or not he cursed when he faced the mutineers, or how he looked when land was sighted, or what he said when he bent his knees in prayer and kissed the new earth that he had discovered. We spend four years in college acquiring a lot of facts, about physics and chemistry and economics and history and philosophy and heaven knows what else; yet I have often wondered why. All these facts are in the books, and all the books are in the library; and we could easily get at them at any time. Why not spend three or four years working our way across the seas to India, so that we might see the Taj Mahal by moonlight?

Of course, I must admit that the intellect must be given a proper amount of exercise, because it is the executive faculty of the mind. The sensibilities bring to the mind tidings of the universe in which we live. The mind reacts to these tidings; and these reactions are emotions. Emotions demand action; and then, of course, the question arises,—What are we to do? This question should be answered by the intellect. It is the intellect which analyzes, judges, orders, and commands the other faculties of the mind. Of course, the intellect must be developed by experience; and it cannot do anybody any harm to study logic or to spend

a year or two with Aristotle. But a mind in which only the intellect is developed is something like a Central American army,—an army in which everybody is a general,—a commander with no troops to command.

I am saying all this because, on this particular morning, it is my privilege to recommend to you the work of J. M. Barrie, who is a man who knows how to educate the emotions. When they made him Rector of St. Andrews University, he got up and made a speech that seems to me more educative than any lecture I have ever listened to at Columbia, where we seem to be so proud of our intelligence. Unless my etymology is at fault, the word "educate" means "to lead out of." Please note that it does *not* mean "to pour into." You cannot educate a passive bucket. The delivery of information to a receptive mind—whether in retail or in wholesale lots—is not education. You cannot educate anybody unless, and until, you manage to lead something out of him. Education results from his response to a mental stimulant. An intellectual appeal is rarely educative; but an emotional appeal almost always is. An emotional appeal arouses the entire mind of the person to whom it is addressed. His imagination is stimulated; and, when that stimulus occurs, his mind is forced to express itself by creating something. This something that his mind creates,—this something that is led out of his mind by his response to an emotional appeal,—may be something that he has known subconsciously all the time, without knowing that he knew it. People who

can haul things up out of other people's minds, as magicians can haul rabbits out of hats, are educators. I do not think that Mr. Bernard Shaw is much of an educator; but I am certain that Sir James Barrie is.

An indication of the limitation of the mind of Mr. Shaw is the fact that he is forever arguing. He is never happy unless he is engaged in an intellectual contention. But you will observe that the really great minds never argue at all. They do not have to. Regarding a particular proposition that is within their province, they know that the thing is so or they know that it is not so; they state the truth about it, and you may take it or leave it; but they will not waste time and energy in arguing. When we read over the four gospels, we do not find Jesus arguing about religion. People came to Him with all kinds of religious contentions; but He merely said,—“You talk about a great many commandments,—ten or a dozen. There are only two: Thou shalt love thy God, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” What was there to argue about? A knowledge so serene as that is an absolute knowledge, because it is a knowledge in which the entire mind participates,—not merely one part of the mind, not merely the intellectual, the logical, the reasoning faculty.

Now Mr. Shaw, when he writes a play and employs the stage of the theatre as a cart-tail, tries to tell people things that they did not know before. He seeks to startle the intelligence of his auditors by giving them something new to think about; and that is, in this



present period, the ordinary aim. But Barrie's aim is different. He never tries to say anything new, nor to surprise his auditors with ideas that have not occurred to them before. He does not try to tell them anything they do not know. Instead, he seeks to remind them of things that they have always known but seemed to have forgotten. He says to them, "Do you remember that time when you were about six years old?", and then he hauls an idea right up out of their own minds. And when they leave the theatre, they say, "I have known that all my life. It has not occurred to me for the last ten or twenty years; but it was very pleasant to be reminded of it; and isn't it jolly to know that Barrie knew it too?"

This second method of teaching—and, if my etymology is correct, we may call it the educative method—seems to me the more appropriate method for the dramatist. The audience has a much better time at a Barrie play than at a Shaw play. Even the young intellectuals who are forever praising Mr. Shaw have a better time at a Barrie play, though most of them are unwilling to confess it, for fear of seeming sentimental. Barrie gives his audience a good time; and the way in which he manages to do it is worthy of critical investigation.

Why do people go to the theatre? They go to the theatre to enjoy themselves. Simple as that answer seems to be, it involves a very important philosophic fact. They go to the theatre to enjoy themselves,—not to enjoy the author, not to enjoy the actors, not

to enjoy the scenery, but to enjoy *themselves*. Nothing really happens in the theatre until it begins to happen inside the minds and hearts of the members of the audience. It is the stimulation of their own emotions, it is the activity of their own intelligence, that they enjoy; and their enjoyment is proportioned to the contribution which their own minds have made to the experience. Now, Mr. Shaw has a tendency to do too much of the work. He thinks the whole thing out; he does too much of the thinking and leaves too little to the audience. But Barrie is canny enough to do comparatively little of the work, and thrifty enough to let his auditors do most of it. He tells them just enough to get them started. Then he tickles their imaginations; and, because their imaginations are stimulated, they are able to enjoy the activity of their own minds even more than they enjoy the activity of his.

And how does Barrie manage to stimulate imaginative auditors to self-enjoyment? A little while ago, I said that he did it by reminding them of what they have always known but seemed to have forgotten. He knows that there is an essential wisdom that everybody has inherited, within himself, from his own childhood. There are certain truths—and these are perhaps the most important truths in life—that children know, and know absolutely. Perhaps they have inherited this wisdom from another world,—if we may lend credence to Plato's philosophy of pre-existence or to Wordsworth's beautiful re-statement of it in the

noblest of his odes. But, as children grow up, they are sent to school and college; and our system of education leads them ultimately to forget nearly all they really used to know. When you go home to-day, just take a look at the people in the subway. Their faces are made dreary by the fact that all of them have forgotten. They have forgotten what you knew, and what I knew, when we were only six years old. I dare say that we have forgotten too; else we shouldn't be here, gathered together for an hour's converse in a university, seeking wistfully we know not what. But salvation will return to our minds only when—in that great phrase that has lived for twenty centuries—we shall become again like little children.

The only important truths in life are truths that were and are and evermore shall be. They lie, for the most part, submerged in our subconsciousness,—heavily overlaid with all the learning that we have heaped on top of them in order to acquire our superfluous M.A.'s and worthless Ph.D.'s. We become wise only at those moments when these truths dive upward out of our subconsciousness into the upper levels of our minds,—when they become part of our consciousness again, and we remember what we really know. I believe that I have said somewhere in print that Barrie performs for this oblivious generation the service of a great reminder. He reminds us of what we were and are and evermore shall be. And that is a better service than to tell us things we do not know; because most of the things we do not know are things of comparatively

small importance, like the things that we can look up in the encyclopedia.

Now I suppose that I ought to review the career of Sir James Barrie—which I may do very briefly—and tell you something about his character and personality. His age does not matter; but, if you want to know it, I suppose that I ought not to withhold the information. After all, I am talking in a university. He was born on the ninth of May, 1860, and he is now sixty-three years old. These facts are of no importance whatsoever, and I advise you to forget them immediately. His parentage, however, is important. He was born in the little town of Kirriemuir in Scotland, which he has celebrated in his fiction under the name of “Thrums”; and his father was a weaver who made patterns at a loom. The only really remarkable thing about his childhood was that he had a mother. Most people haven’t; but J. M. Barrie had. He wrote a book about her later on. It is called “Margaret Ogilvy, by her son.” It is a rare thing to be able to write a book like that; but it is a rarer thing to be able to have a book like that written about you. Barrie’s childhood was uneventful; but a good many things happened inside of him, and you may find out a good deal about them if you will read his novel, “Sentimental Tommy.” His mother managed to scrape up enough money to send him to Dumfries Academy, and later on to Edinburgh University. The Scots may be a backward people in the matter of

motor cars, but they always manage to educate their children.

Barrie began to write in his early twenties; and what he wrote was little sketches of the people he had known at home. At that time, there was no market for writing of this sort. Nearly all the magazines were edited in London, and none of the editors took any interest in the people of Kirriemuir. They objected particularly to the fact that Barrie wrote in the Scottish dialect. They said that nobody could understand it. Because of this, it was some time before he got a start. Nevertheless, he persisted in his purpose; and by the end of his twenties he had managed to place the little town of Thrums on the map of the literary world. In 1888 and 1889, he published two or three volumes of sketches and short stories, including "Auld Licht Idylls" and "A Window in Thrums." "My Lady Nicotine" followed in 1890. Apropos of this book, a point is suggested to me which is of considerable importance. This point is that, when he wrote "My Lady Nicotine," Barrie had never smoked in his life. This fact is so characteristic of the habit of his mind that I shall have to develop the point later on. Throughout his whole career, he has written most knowingly about matters which he has never actually experienced. When you find him writing about something with the utmost fondness and the utmost intimacy, you may infer that that thing is something he has never actually known. He writes about children

with extreme fondness and extreme intimacy; but he has never had any children. At the time when he wrote "My Lady Nicotine," as I have said, he had never smoked in his life. He has smoked ever since, however. When the book was published, he read it over; and it was so appealing in its celebration of the charms of smoking that he took up tobacco at once.

In 1891 he wrote a very popular novel, "The Little Minister." You may remember that it was the fashion in the eighteen-nineties to dramatize nearly every popular novel that came along; but all the experts at that kind of craftsmanship told Barrie that "The Little Minister" could not be dramatized. There wasn't any play in the book. Consequently, he dramatized it himself a little later on; and, as you know, it was enormously successful. The most important of his novels, "Sentimental Tommy," came in 1896. It is a study of the development of the artistic temperament in childhood; and every woman ought to read it before making up her mind to marry a literary man. "Tommy and Grizel" followed in 1900; and Barrie's last book, "The Little White Bird," was published in 1902. Thereafter, he ceased to write fiction; for, by that time, he had become thoroughly engrossed with the theatre.

It was early in the eighteen-nineties that Barrie began to try his hand at writing plays,—a task for which, apparently, he had had no preparation whatsoever. The very fact that he had established himself as a novelist and had attained recognition as a man of



letters was almost sufficient, in the eighteen-nineties, to lead anybody to assume that he would be unfitted to write plays; for we must remember that, throughout the nineteenth century, no successful play had been written by an English novelist, with the single exception of Bulwer-Lytton. Despite the recent success of Mr. Galsworthy, it still remains an exceedingly unusual phenomenon for an author to attain an equal competence as a novelist and as a dramatist.

In 1892, Barrie wrote a play called "Walker, London." I have never seen nor read it; but I know that, after seeing it, the most important dramatic critic of the period, Mr. William Archer, went to Barrie and reasoned with him in an effort to dissuade him from wasting any more time trying to write plays. Mr. Archer, himself a Scotsman, was a good friend of Barrie's; and he assured him that, though he could write novels, he would never be able to write a play. Barrie thanked him for this good advice, and then sat down and wrote another play.

His real start in the theatre came by accident; and, oddly enough, it happened here, in the city of New York. He wrote a little piece called "The Professor's Love Story." It was about a professor who grew exceedingly absent-minded and who did not know what was the matter with himself. He had a secretary who was a very beautiful girl. The trouble with him was that he had fallen in love with her; but he did not realize this fact, because it had never seemed to him intelligent that he should fall in love. There was at

that time on the English stage an actor of great charm, the late E. S. Willard, who used to make a tour of America every year or so. He had silvery hair and a beautiful face and an exceedingly ingratiating voice. He was one of the favorite actors of my childhood; and I still remember him as the well-belovèd Willard. Barrie asked him to read "The Professor's Love Story," and Willard tossed it into his trunk. He came over to New York, and opened his season with some play or other which failed. Then he dug into his trunk, found the manuscript of Barrie's play, read it, and produced it at the old Star Theatre, which used to stand at the corner of Thirteenth Street and Broadway. This was in 1894; and, though I was only twelve years old at the time, I happened to be present at the first performance. Some of you may have seen the piece when it was revived by Mr. George Arliss a few years ago. It seems a little old-fashioned now; but the Professor is a charming character and still affords an appealing part for a charming actor.

Encouraged by the success of "The Professor's Love Story," Barrie tried his hand at dramatizing "The Little Minister," in 1897; and once again he received a recognition, not in London, but in New York. It happened that an American manager, the late Charles Frohman, was able to cast the rather difficult part of Lady Babbie. He entrusted it to a very lovely young girl who was at that time appearing in the company of Mr. John Drew; and, despite her inexperience, she made a great success in the part and established the

author as a popular playwright. Her name was Maude Adams.

Thereafter, Barrie wrote plays more and more, and novels less and less. The reason was that he fell in love with the theatre. It was the only place that he had ever found in his very lonely life where he was able to have a good time. In Barrie's experience, the theatre has been in a literal sense a playhouse,—that is to say, a house to play in. He loves the theatre, and everything in it, and everything about it; and he plays with the theatre just as eagerly as Stevenson in his childhood used to play with the cardboard figures—a penny plain and two-pence colored—of Skelt's Juvenile Drama. Since 1900, Barrie has scarcely led any life at all outside of the theatre; but inside of the theatre he has been thoroughly at home.

Until he fell in love with the theatre, his life, as I have said, had been extremely lonely; and if the Puritans should come along as they did in 1642 and shut the theatre up for eighteen years, I am sure that he would just curl up and die, like a dog deserted by his master. He is not at all the sort of person that one would expect a popular writer to be. The general public quite naturally conceives him as a very charming man; but I don't think that I exaggerate the fact when I say that he is perhaps one of the least charming of the celebrated men of letters in London. I think that the reason why he is always writing about charm, and always writing with charm, is that he never had any personal charm of his own. Do you

remember, in "What Every Woman Knows," how wistfully he writes about Maggie, who was a good girl if you got to know her, but wasn't it a pity that she hadn't any charm? He seems, in his work, to be the friendliest of men. As a matter of fact, he has never had any friends,—except the late Charles Frohman and Sir Edwin Ray Lankester, the director of the South Kensington Museum. If you ever have an opportunity to see him—and such opportunities are not infrequent, since he often lunches all alone at the Savoy Hotel—I should almost advise you to take the next train to Paris, and wait until his next play comes out and see the play instead. He is a curious looking little person. He is very small physically, except that he has a very large head, which looks almost abnormal upon so small a body. He smokes a very large cigar. It looks too large for such a little fellow. He is a very silent person. He is exceedingly shy and uncommunicative. No radiance emerges from him. He does not belong to any clubs, except of course the Athenæum. That is a little like belonging to Westminster Abbey. He lives alone in a house across the street from the Savage Club; but he does not go to the Savage Club. He does not go anywhere. He does not see anybody. He was married for some years, as I suppose you know, and then his wife fell in love with a much younger man. He wanted his wife to be happy; and, as quietly as possible, he secured a divorce so that she might marry the other man. Since then, he has been quite alone.

The tragedy of his life is that, although for years he has been making a great deal of money, probably more money than any other English author, he has not the slightest idea of what to do with it. This tragedy is hinted at in his one-act play, "The Will." His tastes have remained the tastes of the weaver's son of Kirriemuir. He hasn't any use for yachts or motor cars; and he can smoke only one cigar at a time. He has never had any children; there was never any possibility that he would have any children; so he walks around in Kensington Gardens and talks to his dog, and looks at other people's children from afar. He imagines that, if children ever stopped to play with him, they might say certain things; and out of these imagined confidences he has fashioned Peter Pan. Because he is personally unattractive, he likes to write about attractive people; and because he has had little personal intimacy with women during the course of his life, he likes to write most intimately about women, particularly about charming women. His work is really a record of all that he has missed in actual experience. It is the history of his real life; and that history is utterly different from the record of his actual days.

Since Barrie is a very lonely person, who does not do what other people do, he has always found it difficult even to waste time. He had to find some place to play in, and some place to potter about in; and, fortunately for us, that place happened to be the theatre. The theatre has been his home and his club and

his yacht and one might even say his wife and child. Nobody has ever loved the theatre more devotedly. In the year 1910, for instance, Barrie and his friend Charles Frohman decided to give themselves a good time by running a repertory theatre in London. It didn't matter how much it cost, because Barrie already had more money than he knew what to do with. Charles Frohman also was a very shy person, who never went anywhere and had no friends; and he loved the theatre nearly as much as Barrie did. So they ran a repertory season at the Duke of York's and had no end of fun. I was over in London that year and never missed a production at the Duke of York's. They had a fine time producing a lot of plays which nobody but Barrie wanted to see,—like Mr. Galsworthy's "Justice" and Mr. Granville Barker's "Madras House." Now, this love of the theatre shows itself in all of Barrie's work, because there is not any device of the theatre that he does not fondly utilize. Mr. Shaw and Mr. Galsworthy stay at home and write, using dialogue to express ideas which frequently have nothing to do with the theatre. But Barrie does not write his plays at home. He fools around the theatre and finds out ways of getting rid of dialogue. His idea of a good moment in a good part is to find a way of giving an actor nothing at all to say.

His good plays began to come along in 1902, when he produced "Quality Street" and "The Admirable Crichton." I haven't any doubt that "Crichton" is a



lasting composition and that it will interest the public a hundred years from now. "Peter Pan" happened in 1904. He took the manuscript to Charles Frohman, who tried to read it and thought that Barrie had gone mad. It was only because they were such intimate friends and because Barrie was so eager to fool around the theatre that Frohman put the piece on. Since the first production in London, "Peter Pan" has been done every year at Christmas time. It is the only English play that has held the London stage uninterrupted for twenty years. In this country it was produced in 1906, with Maude Adams in the leading rôle. I was present at the first performance, and I remember what a disappointing failure it was. The piece was not well received by the first night audience, and the reviewers said the next day that it was not any good and would have to be taken off. Business was poor for about two weeks. Then the general public began to go to see the play, and it was soon built up into a very great success. You will notice that nearly all the clever theatrical devices that are hailed as novelties nowadays when they are used in such plays as "Beggar on Horseback" were utilized by Barrie in "Peter Pan" twenty years ago.

"Alicè Sit-by-the-Fire," which has always seemed to me a great play, came in 1905. It was followed, in 1908, by "What Every Woman Knows," which is perhaps Barrie's masterpiece in the theatre; and the series has been kept up until the present time. Barrie

is the only great contributor to the English drama who was not silenced by the war. One of his finest plays, "A Kiss for Cinderella," was written during the war; and some of his one-act pieces that deal directly with the war, like "The New Word" and "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals," must be ranked among his greatest compositions.

Of course the plays of Sir James Barrie are not at all representative of the theatrical fashions of his time. He is not a representative author, but an exceptional author. He did not have to achieve individuality; he was born with it. Perhaps the main point in which his plays differ from those of everybody else is in the extraordinary vividness of his visual invention. He is so inventive in his use of visual details that his plays, at the first glance, look to be more unconventional than they actually are. If we examine their construction critically, we shall discover that there is nothing very unusual in their structural technique. Barrie's technical methods are really not new methods but only novel applications of methods long familiar in the theatre. I do not think that he is a great master of construction, like Sir Arthur Pinero; but his plays are patterned soundly, in conformity with formulas that have been tested by time. If you will examine "Alice Sit-by-the-Fire," for example, you will notice that he is thoroughly familiar with the pattern of the well-made play. "The Admirable Crichton," "What Every Woman Knows," even "A Kiss for Cinderella," are carefully planned and firmly built. Their apparent ca-

priciousness is merely a matter of detail and does not affect their fundamental structure.

But Barrie's strongest points as a playwright are, first, the peculiar intimacy of his characterization and, second, the subtlety of his dialogue, including—as a corollary to this second point—his superlative ability to get along without dialogue.

He gives us a greater sense of intimacy with his people than any other contemporary playwright. This is particularly true in regard to his women and children. He really seems to know something about women; and of course this faculty is rare. It is rare among novelists, because most novelists are men; and it is even rarer among dramatists, because nearly all dramatists are men. George Meredith knew something about women; but Robert Louis Stevenson knew nothing about them,—that is, in his work. Sir Arthur Pinero knows something about women; but Mr. Bernard Shaw knows nothing about them whatsoever. Sir James Barrie seems to know everything about them. I wonder how he ever found it out. He himself has said that all that he knows about women he learned from his mother; and it seems to be a fact that he has never been extremely intimate with any other woman.\* Also he knows children. That is an even rarer faculty than knowing women; and how he ever found out about them nobody will ever know. Perhaps our modern system of education might amount to more if we could introduce successful courses into our universities to teach men how to understand women and chil-

dren. If such a course is ever attempted at Columbia, I hope that the chair will be offered to Sir James Barrie.

Now, Barrie, in the first place, knows his own characters with a peculiar intimacy and, in the second place, he has a subtle faculty for establishing an intimate contact with the people in his audience. He seems to slip into the seat beside you and to watch the play with you as it goes along. When a new character comes upon the stage, he seems to lean close to you and whisper, "You and I know all about this woman. She doesn't understand herself; and there is a lot about her that most people might not appreciate,—especially the members of her own family. But I am on to her, and so are you; because she is very much like you—or is it your sister I am thinking of?" Every once in a while, he pokes you in the ribs and says, "That was clever of her, wasn't it?" And when "Alice Sit-by-the Fire," for example, speaks her sad and lovely valedictory to youth, he just reaches over and takes you by the hand. You always know that he is there, in the seat beside you, having just as good a time as you are in recognizing the reality of the people on the stage.

I am glad that I stumbled on that phrase about the recognition of reality; for to me the most remarkable thing about the plays of Sir James Barrie is their astonishing reality. They are more real, to my mind, more like life itself, than the plays of any of his contemporaries in the English drama. People say that

his compositions are fantastic. I don't think they are fantastic,—not even "A Kiss for Cinderella." They are real. People talk about his fancy; but I don't think that he is fanciful. He is imaginative. He knows one thing which is a very important thing to know, and he knows it absolutely; and that is that nothing in experience is real until it has been imagined. The actual is not the real. Facts are not truths. Actuality becomes reality, and facts become truths, only through the alchemy of imaginative transmutation. During the next three or four hours, let us say that a thousand, or ten thousand, facts may happen to me. I shall pay no attention to nine-tenths of them or more, because my mind will be otherwise engrossed. Then, for me, those nine hundred, or nine thousand, facts will not really exist at all. But if I pay attention to the remaining one hundred, or one thousand, facts, these few may become really existent for me; but, to make them existent, I shall have to imagine them. The only reality of experience is what happens inside of our own heads, what happens in our imagination. I read in the newspapers the other morning that Tokio had been overwhelmed by an enormous earthquake and that thousands of people had been killed; but, for some reason or other, my imagination was not stimulated, and I went about my daily business without concern. But if my pet dog had died, that would have been a tragedy. Why? Not because I think that the death of one dog is more important than the death of thousands of

people in Japan. The tragedy would come from what would happen in my mind when the dog died; and the reason why no tragedy occurred when I read that thousands of people had been killed in an earthquake was that my mind didn't do anything about it. I remember how disappointed I was, in 1914, when I met people in this country who were not personally affected, or appeared not to be, by the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral. I had to analyze the situation with my intelligence; and then I realized that few, if any, of these other people had climbed all over Rheims Cathedral, as I had, at the impressionable age of eighteen. Rheims was real to me; and to them it wasn't real at all. They probably thought that it was something that could be rebuilt with a few million dollars, like the definition of a cathedral that stands on Fifth Avenue at Fiftieth Street. If you should learn nothing else from Barrie's plays, I hope you will learn this: that there is nothing real or true in life except what has happened within the imagination.

Now, his other great gift, as I have said, is his mastery of dialogue, and in particular his superlative ability to get along without dialogue. It is not till very recently that the plays of Barrie have been published. For years and years, he kept them out of print; and, when people urged him to publish them, he used to say, "If I should print the plays, the public would get on to me and would be disappointed. So long as people see my plays in the theatre, they may think that they are



literature, like my novels; but, if they should read the texts, they would find out that my plays are not literature." Then, if he were urged further, he would point out the fact that the very best moments in his plays were moments in which nobody said anything at all, and that these moments would be difficult to print. Do you remember the wordless close of the second act of "The Admirable Crichton," and how completely this silent pantomime summed up the entire theme and essence of the play? Consider also, for example, the opening of "What Every Woman Knows." Not a word is said for three entire minutes; but, before the first line is spoken, we have become thoroughly familiar with the household of the Wylies.

Barrie has finally been persuaded to publish his plays; but, in order to make them publishable, he has had to write them all over again. Realizing that the dialogue was often the least important part of his plays, he has been obliged to fill in all of the moments of silence and to offer substitutions for all of the moments of pantomime by writing little comments to make up for what the reader loses by missing the visual panorama of the stage. Sometimes he writes several paragraphs of charmingly irrelevant material just to make the reader pause a proper length of time before reading the next line of the dialogue. These comments are not stage directions, in the technical sense; they are not intended for the guidance of the actors or the stage-director. They are a translation into literary terms of the non-

literary business of the stage. What he has done is to make a literary report of a theatrical production. In doing so, he has invented a new form of fiction, which is much more readable than the ordinary transcript of a play.

## FIFTH LECTURE

### SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

MARCH 10, 1924

WE have recently discussed the work of Mr. Bernard Shaw, who writes plays with the intellect, and the work of Sir James Barrie, who writes plays with the emotions. We are now going to discuss the work of Sir Arthur Pinero, who writes plays with both the intellect and the emotions,—with the two so harmoniously blended that it is impossible to distinguish one from the other. Mr. Shaw uses the theatre as a lecture-platform. Sir James Barrie uses the theatre, literally, as a playhouse,—that is to say, a house in which to play. Sir Arthur Pinero uses the theatre merely as a theatre. Mr. John Galsworthy writes plays for the sake of social service. Sir Arthur Pinero writes plays for the sake of writing plays. He feels that to master the craftsmanship of any art, to depict life truthfully through the medium of any craft, is in itself sufficient exercise for any man. I myself can see no logical reason why the theatre should seek to be anything else than the theatre or why a play should seek to be anything else than a play. If Mr. Shaw prefers to lecture, why shouldn't he hire a hall? I am sure that, if he should come to this country on a lecture tour, he would attract very large

audiences and would ruin the business of most of the lecturers who have the misfortune to be Americans. If Mr. Galsworthy is so bent on social service, why doesn't he go into organized social work, why doesn't he go into politics? I should say off-hand that prison-reform should begin in the prison. Why begin it in the theatre? I have no desire to dispraise the high intent of Mr. Galsworthy; but it seems to me that, in theory at least, his medium is mistaken. The theatre is primarily a temple of entertainment; and the purpose of the drama is to make the public, by imaginative means, emotionally aware of life.

In recent years, it has become rather fashionable to disparage the plays of Sir Arthur Pinero. Most of this disparagement comes from people who have not seen his plays in the theatre, and a great deal of it comes from people who have not even studied his plays in the library. Much of it comes also from people who saw his plays so many years ago that they have forgotten them and who have never subsequently taken the trouble to read them over. In other words, the current disparagement comes mainly from people who are ignorant of Pinero and his work. There have been periods in the past when commentators would have hesitated to print disparaging opinions of artistic work with which they were not thoroughly familiar; but nowadays ignorance appears to be regarded as an asset by many of our most widely read reviewers. If a man is commissioned to write a critical essay about a painter's work and to tell a million readers what to think of it,

it is apparently regarded nowadays as essential to his equipment that he should never have seen any of the great paintings of the world. If he should take the trouble to go to Madrid to study Velasquez in the Prado, the experience might cramp his style. Pinero's "Iris" has not been acted in our theatre since 1902; yet I have heard this masterpiece pooh-poohed by popular reviewers who are still so young that they could not possibly have seen it twenty-two years ago.

Reviewers at the present time—particularly very young reviewers—have a horror of the traditional and the old-fashioned. They forget that Shakespeare is traditional and that Sheridan is old-fashioned. There seems to be a superstition in this present age that old fashions are necessarily bad fashions. That is not true. The latest fashions are not always—not even often—by any means the best. Because we wear the clothes of the current year, it does not follow that these are better than the clothes of other years. The Athenians in the period of Pericles dressed better than we dress to-day. In certain moods, I wish very much that I might be allowed to dress in the fashion that was prevalent in the court of Louis Fourteenth of France, instead of wearing the undertaker's clothes in which you see me garbed on Monday mornings.

There are several reasons for the current disparagement of Pinero. One is that he has been eminent for so long a time. He has contributed to the English theatre more than fifty plays—most of them enormously successful—and these plays have been released

during six successive decades. Early in the eighteenthies—which is forty years ago—he was already recognized as the leading living playwright in our language. In the busily creative eighteen-nineties, he stood head and shoulders higher than any of his rivals. At that time, there was no second. Mr. Henry Arthur Jones was third. In the first decade of the twentieth century, he wrote three of the greatest plays in the English language, not only of our time but of any time, —“Iris,” “The Thunderbolt,” and “Mid-Channel.” During the last ten years, of course, he has been comparatively inactive, owing to the war; and, since he is now sixty-eight years old, it seems unlikely that he will write much more in the future. But, from the outset of the eighteen-eighties to the outbreak of the war, he had ranked for so many years as the undisputed leader of the English drama that we may easily discern one reason why he is disparaged nowadays. In this particular period, the public cannot easily endure the idea of anybody being eminent very long. I remember Will Rogers saying to me in a barber-shop in California, “It isn’t hard for a fellow to get famous nowadays; the hard thing is for him to *keep* famous.”

We have fallen into a period of restlessness, in which people seem to think that it is a mental duty to be forever changing their minds. Old standards are tossed aside. It seems to be assumed that since they are old they cannot be standard. The Winged Victory of Samothrace has been beautiful for more than two thousand years; but just wait a week or two, and some



bright young critic will discover that it isn't beautiful at all. Sometimes I wander through a book-store and give myself a laugh by reading the jackets of the latest publications. One day I picked up a dozen new books—each of them the first work of fiction by an unknown author—and in each instance the jacket stated that the new author was better than Rudyard Kipling. That has become a stock phrase. Everybody is better than Mr. Kipling. Even the reviewers are beginning to assume this as an axiom. Of course, Mr. Kipling has been for forty years the greatest living person who writes in the English language; and, in this restless age, people just can't bear it any longer. For nowadays the reviewers, and the public also, like to discover some new genius every year or every month or every week. Sir Arthur Pinero has been eminent for half a century; it is time for them to discover Zoë Akins and to compare her work with his.

If, on a snowy morning, a gentleman ventures out with a top hat, he immediately becomes a target for all the brisk young boys who desire to express themselves. A tall head is also a natural target; and if a head towers over other heads, it is the custom of the populace to hurl mud at it. In this country, we like to elect men to office because of their conspicuous ability; and, as soon as they have been elected, we like to ridicule them and insult them. We do it constantly. Observe what we have done to our recent presidents,—hounded them into early graves. We heaved bricks at Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Wilson. We have not as yet begun to heave

bricks at Mr. Coolidge; but just wait a few months, until the next political campaign gets under way.

But there is a further, and a special, reason why Sir Arthur Pinero is disparaged at the present time. That is because he knows his business, because he has learned his job—taking a lifetime to learn it, and because he always does a good job. He is a thoroughly competent craftsman; and thoroughly competent craftsmanship has become, for the moment, unfashionable.

I am not quite sure of all the reasons for this heresy; but I am certain that it is only a momentary aberration. We have fallen into a period when it is commonly assumed that good workmanship is a thing to be despised rather than a thing to be admired. There is no logic to this. Whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well. If people are to be workmen, they ought to be good workmen. There is no logic whatsoever on the other side; yet, at the present time, there seems to be an assumption that if anybody knows his job and does it well, there must be something the matter with him. It is assumed that, if an author, by twenty years of constant toil, has taught himself to say things well, he cannot possibly have anything to say. Would it not be more logical to assume that, if an author really has something to say, he ought to be willing to teach himself to say it well, even if it takes him twenty years?

There are various reasons for this prevailing aberration; but I think it has resulted, for the most part, from the war. The war was an interruption to the

orderly course of our natural development; and, in particular, it was a great and astounding interruption for the young. Under ordinary conditions, our young men who had reached the age of eighteen or nineteen when the *Lusitania* was sunk would have been starting out on their apprenticeships for whatever would have been their chosen careers. If they had decided to become doctors or lawyers or writers, they would have been starting out to study medicine or law or literature. But the war caught them up and swept them into what was at the moment a more important activity. Though our human contribution to the war was not comparable to that of France or England, we raised an army of three or four million men; and most of these men were fellows in their early twenties. In the army, they led a very active, a very interesting, and a very exciting life,—a life under the influence of which they matured, in some respects, very quickly. Then they returned to civilian life, having lost three or four years out of the ordinary course of their development. But they were not aware of any loss. They were more aware of a certain gain. They felt older than they actually were. After their unusual experience, it was a little difficult for them to readjust themselves to the usual course of events. It was rather late for them to start in studying medicine, or law, or writing; and they felt a natural impatience and a natural desire to get on quickly. They brought back to civilian life a new sense of hasty activity engendered by the war; and, starting their apprenticeships at the age of twenty-three or twenty-

four instead of at the age of eighteen or nineteen, they wanted to be doctors in a year, or lawyers in a month, or writers in a week. This almost desperate sense of hastiness seems to rush through all of our life in the present period; and it carries with it, as a corollary, a disparagement of all that is careful, thorough, methodical, and orderly.

Of course this is not the first period in history when young people have felt that they have a great deal to say. Other periods when the same thing happened were when we were twenty-one, and our fathers and our fathers' fathers before us. In our youth, we all discover a great many things; and, in our ignorance, we assume that these things have never been discovered before. Therefore we wish to announce them to the world. We desire, as the phrase is, to express ourselves. We are bursting with things to express. In periods less hasty and impatient than the present, young people who were convinced that they had something of value to say were willing to learn some articulate method of expression. To master the technical method of any of the arts usually takes about twenty years. The more slowly an apprentice goes about it, the more likely it is that he will ultimately learn to express himself with clearness, force, and elegance. But our post-war generation cannot work and wait for twenty years. It wants to express itself immediately, without knowing how; and it is too impatient to learn.

The only way in which it can attempt to justify its own impatience is to cultivate a disparaging attitude

toward those artists of the less impatient period before the war who did learn their crafts through long and laborious apprenticeships. Tennyson devoted fifteen years to daily practice of the subtle craft of setting words together before he emerged as the leading poet of his time. Our young people who want to be poets in a month, without knowing anything about the laws of rhythm or of literation, cannot forgive him for that. They despise Tennyson for writing verse so perfectly. Their own verse isn't perfect; it isn't even verse. It follows, in their logic, that Tennyson must be despised. They disparage Stevenson because he taught himself to write prose. It took him twenty years to do it. He began practicing deliberately and conscientiously at the age of eight. He practiced every day; and he published his first short-story at the age of twenty-eight,—twenty years afterward. By that time he had learned something about rhythm and about the patterning of consonants and vowels. Consequently, our young geniuses who have no ear for prose must necessarily hurl mud at Stevenson.

This whole attitude seems to me exceedingly silly. Into the theatre is carried the self-contradictory hypothesis that the drama should be undramatic, that the theatre should be untheatrical, that a play should have no pattern but should begin nowhere, get nowhere, and end nowhere. The very phrase, "a well-made play," has latterly become a slogan of reproach, as if a playwright who did his work well should be despised, as if making a play well were a fault. There is no logic

in that. It is, of course, in consequence of his superlative craftsmanship that Sir Arthur Pinero has become a conspicuous target for this kind of criticism. Because it has become unfashionable to praise him at the present time, it is well for us now and then, in order to secure ourselves against hysteria, to go back and re-read his plays and see how good they are. Otherwise we might forget, as so many of the present-day reviewers have forgotten. Every year or so they discover some new genius in the drama, whose plays are usually written and acted in a language not one word of which they understand. Last year they discovered Anton Tchekoff. He was a great dramatist, they tell us, because he did not know anything about making plays and repeatedly said so in his personal letters. His plays have no plot and no plan; but that is because he was a genius and geniuses cannot be bothered with a pattern. Whenever you are told such nonsense as that, go back and read "Mid-Channel" once again, and "Iris," and give Pinero a chance, even if he does write in a language that you can understand.

I shall now review the career of Sir Arthur Pinero, in order to emphasize the extent of his apprenticeship, the long and careful preparation for his work. The first play of his which may be accepted as a great play is "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," which initiated the modern English drama. It was produced in 1893, when he was thirty-eight years old; and it was the twenty-eighth play which he had produced in the theatre. Nowadays new writers are often hailed as gen-



iuses on the strength of one play, or possibly two. After they have written three plays, they begin to be forgotten. They are no longer new; they begin to be suspected of being old-fashioned; and the reviewers and the public are already on the outlook for later geniuses. But Pinero wrote twenty-seven farces and sentimental comedies before he even attempted to write a serious drama.

You will notice that his name is a rather peculiar name for a British author. His ancestry is curious and interesting. On his father's side, he is of Portuguese and Jewish extraction, and, on his mother's side, of Anglo-Saxon and Gentile. The blending of so many different racial strains in a single personality is much less common in England than it is rapidly becoming in America. Pinero was born and brought up in London. His father was a lawyer. Pinero himself was educated to pursue the same profession; but he renounced this purpose at the age of eighteen, because he was interested in the theatre and wanted to be an actor. He acted for a year in Edinburgh and a year in Liverpool. Then he came up to London and secured an engagement at the Lyceum Theatre in the celebrated company of Henry Irving. For five years he acted with Irving, playing small parts like Rosencrantz in "Hamlet." Meanwhile he wrote five one-act plays, which were produced in successive years, two of them being put on at the Lyceum. Irving assured Pinero that, if he worked hard, he might become a good playwright; but he seems to have offered him less en-

couragement in regard to his possible future as an actor. But Pinero knew what he was doing. He remained on the stage for seven years because he wanted to learn how plays looked from the actor's point of view; and, when he thought that he had learned this preliminary lesson, he left the stage and devoted all his time to writing plays. In this particular regard, his experience parallels that of Shakespeare, who began his career in the theatre as an actor and became a playwright later on. Although Pinero was not an actor of the first rank—like Molière, for instance—he learned so much about the art of acting during his five years in Irving's company that he became one of the ablest stage-directors of his time.

Any actor who has ever played in the original production of a Pinero play will assure you that there can be no more satisfactory engagement in the theatre. If you ask the reason why, you will be told that the Pinero plays are so perfectly planned that the actors have no difficulty with their business. The author, at rehearsals, knows precisely what he wants and why; there is no doubt or hesitance or indecision. The parts are so professionally written that, after the actors have read them over three or four times, they know them by heart; they never seem to forget a speech or stumble over a line. In the original production of a Pinero play, the acting that the public sees is, to a great extent, the author's; and I think that the main reason why actors are eager to work for him is that, without letting them know it, he does most of their work for them.

Sir Arthur told me once that if, after writing and even printing the text of a new play, he should die before producing it, the work would be only half completed. In other words, he thought that the dramatist was just as responsible for the casting and the acting as he was for the composition of the play, and that his work at rehearsals was just as much a part of the play as the dialogue.

In the eighteen-eighties, Pinero began to write two different types of plays. In one type he carried over from his predecessor in the English drama, Thomas William Robertson, a certain kind of sentimental comedy which Robertson had established in the previous generation, with such compositions as "Caste," which is still occasionally acted in the theatre. As early as the eighteen-sixties, Robertson had conceived the revolutionary idea that the stage might be used to represent life realistically—to hold, in a literal sense, the mirror up to nature—and that what went on upon the stage might be handled as an imitation of what went on in actual life. We now see that his theory outreached his execution, for, as a matter of fact, his plays were extremely artificial; but he meant well, and he taught Pinero his trade. Pinero carried on the Robertson tradition through many of his early plays, all the way down to "Sweet Lavender" and "Lady Bountiful." "Sweet Lavender," which was first produced in 1888, represents the English drama of the eighteen-eighties at its best. That isn't saying very much; as you will discover if you will read over, for historical reasons,

the text of this sentimental comedy. It was very wishy-washy and very goody-goody. I do not like it at all; and neither does Sir Arthur, since he wrote "The Thunderbolt." But it was exceedingly popular and made a good deal of money. The late Edward Terry acted the leading part in "Sweet Lavender" more than seven thousand times; and heaven only knows how many thousands of times the piece has been played by other companies.

At the same time, in the eighteen-eighties, Pinero was signally successful in developing a new type of farce. After he had written "The Rocket" and "In Chancery" for Edward Terry, the actor-managers of the Court Theatre, John Clayton and Arthur Cecil, begged Pinero to rescue their enterprise from bankruptcy by writing them a play which would draw money to the box-office; and—always willing to oblige—he did so. He wrote a farce called "The Magistrate." It was first produced in 1885; and, thus far, it has held the English stage for thirty-nine years. A few seasons ago, it bobbed up on Broadway as a musical comedy, under the altered title of "Good Morning, Judge!" In writing "The Magistrate," Pinero developed a new formula for farce,—the formula of showing probable people doing improbable things. While the incidents might be extravagant and preposterous, he insisted on making the characters true to life. This formula was so successful that the actor-managers of the Court Theatre asked him to continue to make money for them; and he did so, with "The Schoolmis-

tress," "Dandy Dick," and "The Cabinet Minister." Meanwhile, Pinero became almost equally successful with more serious compositions, such as "The Weaker Sex," "The Hobby Horse," and "The Profligate"; and, by the end of the eighteen-eighties, he had established himself as far and away the leader of all living English playwrights.

At the age of thirty-eight, and with twenty-seven plays behind him, Pinero stood at the top of the heap; and, when a man stands at the top of a heap, it is usually hard for him to find a farther place to go. But Pinero knew that the English drama of his time was far inferior to that of several other countries,—particularly France. It had been so long divorced from literature that the plays which were readable were unactable and the plays which wereactable were unreadable. Not a single great play had been written in the English language since Sheridan's "The School for Scandal," in 1777. Throughout the first nine decades of the nineteenth century, the English theatre had been kept illustrious by a great galaxy of great actors, all the way from Kemble and Mrs. Siddons through Kean and Macready and Phelps to Irving; but none of these actors had taken any interest in the development of contemporary English authorship. When they were not playing Shakespeare, they preferred to appear in imitations of Shakespeare—such imitations as the "Virginians" of Sheridan Knowles and the "Richelieu" of Bulwer-Lytton; and, when they needed a contemporary play, they stole it from France. In the absence

of international copyright, it was cheaper to steal a French play than to pay for an English one. Consequently, with the possible exception of Robertson, no English dramatist worthy of serious consideration had appeared in over a hundred years. The educated English public had long ceased to take the drama seriously; and the theatre, at that time, was as much despised by people of intelligence and taste as all but the very best motion pictures are despised to-day by cultivated people. Pinero, therefore, at the outset of the eightennineties, resolved to make a very earnest effort to create a modern English drama that should be worthy of serious consideration.

In 1891, an important thing happened to the English theatre. It discovered Ibsen. Mr. William Archer had been writing articles about him for some time; but because Ibsen was a great dramatist, who took life seriously, the British censorship assumed that he must be immoral, and public presentations of his best plays were forbidden. In 1891, however, the Independent Theatre Society found a way of getting around the censorship and managed to give a few private matinées of "Ghosts." Pinero saw this play and studied the other plays of the grim giant of the north. He was greatly influenced by Ibsen's tragic interest in the conflict between the individual and his social environment; but, though he studied Ibsen's technique very carefully, he decided to reject it. Pinero thought that the straightforward structure of the French was preferable to the retrospective structure of the great Nor-



wegian. He preferred the pattern employed by Alexandre Dumas, *filis*, to the pattern of Ibsen's "Ghosts." And, after an earnest study of the Continental drama, Pinero prepared the first of his really important plays,—"The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," which was ready in 1893.

Ibsen's plays, as I have said, had been acted in London only privately, at special matinées; and, though Pinero managed by extreme adroitness to get around the British censorship, it never occurred to him that "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" could be presented for more than three or four special matinées. The intelligent public would be exhausted by that time; and he did not expect this tragic drama to make much of an appeal to the populace. But after he had made arrangements with George Alexander, the actor-manager, for a series of matinée performances, it happened that the presumably popular play which had been written for the evening bill turned out to be a disappointing failure; and Alexander, to keep his theatre open, decided on the very daring plan of presenting "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" in the evenings as his regular attraction. It was first produced on May 27, 1893. It was tremendously successful. It ran for hundreds of nights; and it has held the stage intermittently, in all parts of the English-speaking world, from that day to this. Of course, "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" has subsequently been surpassed in the English theatre. Pinero himself has surpassed it in three or more of his later compositions. But it is a great play; and in 1893

it was the first great play that had been written in the English language for one hundred and sixteen years. Its historical importance is, therefore, even greater than its value and vitality as a work of art. It initiated the modern English social drama, and established it not only as a possibility but as a fact. By this play, and by others that immediately followed it, Pinero brought the cultivated British public back to the theatre and prepared and organized an intelligent and serious-minded audience for later dramatists like Mr. Shaw and still later dramatists like Mr. Galsworthy.

In craftsmanship, "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" revolutionized the English drama. It was written with an entirely new technique. It was the first play in the English language in which the dramatist dispensed with those first aids to exposition,—the soliloquy and the aside. Ibsen, in his later realistic dramas, had discarded these labor-saving devices; and Pinero made up his mind to get along without them. Until that time, all of his plays had used soliloquies and his dialogue had been plentifully sprinkled with asides. To-day, when you re-read "Sweet Lavender" and "The Magistrate," they seem to you exceedingly old-fashioned; but you should not forget that it was Pinero himself who made them seem old-fashioned, by initiating and establishing a totally new fashion which rendered obsolete the technical method of his twenty-seven previous plays.

Whenever you read in the New York newspapers that some new play produced last night is the greatest

play of the season, or the greatest play of the decade, or the greatest play of the century, or the greatest play that the reviewer has ever seen, by all means go to see it. Study it very carefully; and then go home and re-read "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." By this exercise, you will gain an insight regarding the critical standards of some of our reviewers; and you will enjoy, with an emotion that has in it something of surprise, the experience of discovering once again how thrilling an appeal to the dramatic sense "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" continues to put forth.

Pinero's technical ideal has been set forth with perfect candor in his celebrated lecture on "Robert Louis Stevenson: The Dramatist," wherein he says that the dramatist should tell a story "in such skilfully devised form and order as shall, within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation, give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect the production of which is the one great function of the theatre." You will notice that I have learned those lines by heart; for they constitute one of the fundamental doctrines of my own creed as a dramatic critic. For the sake of emphasis, let me repeat Sir Arthur's assertion that the one great function of the theatre is to produce a certain peculiar kind of emotional effect. I agree with him absolutely. It is obvious that this is not the creed of Mr. Shaw nor the creed of Mr. Galsworthy; but it was the creed of Shakespeare and it was the creed of Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides. Furthermore, Sir Arthur

tells us that, if a dramatist sets out to produce this peculiar kind of emotional effect, his merit should be measured in proportion as he manages to produce the greatest possible amount of this effect within the limits of an ordinary theatrical representation. It is precisely by this standard, and no other, that "Othello" and "Macbeth" and "The Trojan Women" and "Ædipus the King" must be ranked, and always have been ranked, high up among the very greatest plays of the world; and I can see no logic in a critical attempt to class any play as great which refuses to be measured by this standard. For instance, the main reason why I know that Mr. Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" is not a good play is that it does not come anywhere near to giving rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect which any dramatist, with Joan of Arc as his subject, ought to be able to evoke in the course of three hours and a half.

Encouraged by the success of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," Pinero immediately wrote "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith," an even more ambitious drama, which does not seem to me, however, to be so finely made or so perfectly accomplished. Because of his keen interest in the character of the heroine, Sir Arthur himself prefers this play to "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray"; but it contains certain elements which were timely in 1895 and which, on that account, are losing some of their significance as the years proceed. In that same season of 1895, Pinero also produced "The Benefit of the Doubt," which Mr. Bernard Shaw,

in his capacity as a practicing dramatic critic, regarded at the time as the finest of the Pinero plays. It has a wonderful first act and an exceedingly ingenious second act; but the third and final act is weak and disappointing.

Since 1895, Sir Arthur Pinero—he was knighted in 1909—has continued to write serious plays at intervals of two or three years; and, between these serious plays, he has reverted to his earlier mood and written lighter entertainments. He has done this deliberately, to refresh himself. I happened to see him in 1910, shortly after he had completed two monumental dramas, "The Thunderbolt" and "Mid-Channel"; and, since I knew that he was writing a new piece at the time, I asked him what it was about. He answered that it was about nothing at all, that it was a very light and very frivolous farce, and that he was writing it for fun, to give himself a rest. This playful piece turned out to be "Preserving Mr. Panmure"; and, immediately afterward, Pinero turned serious again and wrote "The 'Mind-the-Paint' Girl" and "The Big Drum."

In the Library Edition of Pinero's Social Dramas which I had the pleasant privilege of editing a few years ago, I included, after "Mrs. Tanqueray" and "Mrs. Ebbsmith," "The Gay Lord Quex," "Iris," "Letty," "His House in Order," "The Thunderbolt," and "Mid-Channel." These eight plays are Pinero's weightiest and most important dramas; and, in my opinion, the best of them all are "Iris," "The Thunderbolt," and "Mid-Channel." I have no means of judg-

ing which is the greatest of these three; but I am confident that "Mid-Channel," "The Thunderbolt," and "Iris" are the three greatest plays that, thus far, have been written in the English language in the twentieth century. You need not take my word for this, you need not even take the word of Mr. William Archer, who ought to know a great play when he sees one; but, in view of the current disparagement of Pinero, please promise me at least that you will re-read those three plays before you accept the contrary opinion of anybody else.

Before proceeding to discuss the general characteristics of his serious plays, I may as well tell you a little about Pinero's personality and about his habits of workmanship. He is a man of extraordinarily attractive personality, a man of astonishing brilliancy and charm, a very magnetic person. All the charm you would imagine that Barrie ought to have, in person, Pinero has,—Pinero, the author of such apparently unsympathetic dramas as "The Thunderbolt" and such pitiless plays as "Iris" and "Mid-Channel." The main reason why he is so charming is that he is tremendously alive. He radiates energy. He is not very tall; and he is plump without being too stout for his height. His figure reminds you of that of Napoleon. He has a very wonderful face and head, with extraordinarily brilliant beady black eyes, overshadowed by the thickest and bushiest eyebrows I have ever seen. He has a very fine profile of the Jewish type. He is exceedingly dapper in appearance. He dresses very well, but some-



what obviously well; he is the sort of person who always has a flower in his buttonhole. He paces the room very rapidly, his hands flickering with a Latin nimbleness of gesture. He is very quick and snappy in conversation; exceedingly brilliant, witty, and clever; and tremendously young. He is now, of course, in his late sixties; but he gives you the impression of a very young person. Everybody who knows him at all adores him.

When he is not writing a play, he is one of the most genial people in England; but, when he is making a new play, he does not see anybody at all. He retires from London and buries himself in the country. He doesn't start with a theme; he doesn't start with an incident or a series of incidents; but he starts with certain characters who happen to interest him. Down at his place in the country, he lives alone with these imagined characters. They become more real to him than the actual friends that he has left behind in London. He watches them; he observes what they think and feel; he listens to them and hears what they say. He told me once that, when they get to talking at dinner-time, he has to go without his dinner. Then, after he has brought these imagined people together and lived with them for two or three months, he finds that they do certain things to each other, because of the natural and inevitable clash of character on character; and, when incidents result, he observes them and collects them into a series of events.

Then he proceeds into the second phase of his work,

which is to arrange these events into a pattern of skillfully devised form and order. This second process is not emotional but intellectual; it is a matter of almost mathematic calculation. He devotes several months to the task of building his play, constructing it from beginning to end, until the entire pattern is worked out with the utmost thoroughness. Then he usually gives himself a vacation. He returns to London, reappears at the Garrick Club, sees his friends, and has a good time. After that, he goes back to the country and writes the dialogue of the play,—a comparatively easy exercise. He prints the text privately, selects the actors, rehearses the play, and works with unremitting industry up to the last moment of the final dress rehearsal. Then, oddly enough, he disappears from the theatre and never enters it again. He is the only dramatist I know who never attends the first night of any of his plays and almost never attends any other night. Most of his plays he has never seen with an audience. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, he is personally modest and does not like to be seen by the public in and around the theatre; and, in the second place, after he has done his utmost with a play, it does not interest him any more.

But, during the year or so when he is making a new play, he works with an absolute focus of attention. He thinks about that play and absolutely nothing else; and, in order to resign himself to the life of that play, he retires from actual life. He does not go anywhere; he does not see anybody; he does not answer any let-

ters. He does not attempt to live in two worlds at once. He cannot at the same time live actually with his friends in London and live really with the Mortimore family in "The Thunderbolt." I think that more people might write good plays if they were brave enough to retire from actual life for the purpose of sharing with unimpeded intimacy the real life of their imagined characters. Ibsen, you may remember, withdrew from social intercourse entirely when he started work upon a play, and did not talk to anybody for two years, until his task was done. When you study an Ibsen play or a Pinero play, you receive an impression of a finished job. There is nothing hasty, nothing careless, nothing uncompleted in the composition. Even those reviewers who speak contemptuously of Pinero admit that he is a great craftsman. They do not deny that, from the technical standpoint, he is the ablest playwright still living in the world; but they hold this fact against him, since good workmanship has become unfashionable.

But let us now examine the content of his plays. What interests Pinero primarily is character, and the relation of individual character to social environment. He is interested in creating certain people, and in showing how these people are influenced for better or for worse by the social conditions under which they live. You will observe that, in general, the subject-matter of his serious dramas is similar to that of Ibsen. Now, while Pinero's characters seem to me exceedingly interesting, there is this that may be said against them: they are, for the most part, rather ex-

ceptional people. He does not seem to be interested in general or universal types of character. He is interested more in people who, though not precisely queer, are to some extent eccentric; and we sometimes feel that, though these people are very keenly studied and are depicted with the uttermost fidelity to life, they are scarcely the kind of people that we should meet very frequently in actual experience.

Pinero does not try to formulate and state any general ideas about life; he tries to create life, and to stimulate the spectator to formulate his own ideas about it. He has assured me that he has never started a play with an abstract theme, as Ibsen started out in the instance of "A Doll's House." He does not try to prove a thesis. He starts out by creating certain characters, and lets the characters work out the play. He admits that, when the play is finished, it often presents a theme which might be summarized in a critical paragraph—as in the instance of "Mid-Channel," for example; but he insists that the characters put the theme into play and that he himself did not.

You will notice that his characterization is utterly objective. He keeps himself out of his plays. You cannot tell whether he agrees with his characters or not; you cannot even tell whether he likes them or dislikes them. That sardonic masterpiece, "The Thunderbolt," was not very successful in the theatre; and in talking with the author about its comparative unpopularity, I ventured an opinion that the uncritical public enjoys a play or not according to whether or not it

happens to like the people in it. I then went on to say that the members of the Mortimore family were drawn with such uncompromising truthfulness that the people in the audience were made uncomfortable. They hated the Mortimores because they could not bear to see a group of characters displaying the same objectionable faults which were common in themselves. Thereupon, Sir Arthur surprised me by telling me that he himself felt a personal fondness for the members of the Mortimore family. Despite their faults, he did not hate them at all; and, during the many months that he had lived with them, he had almost grown to love them.

He then went on to tell me that he had come to a time of life when he was no longer interested in the popular type of heró and heroine. In particular, he was no longer interested in what were commonly regarded as good people. He said that the only characters that interested him any more were people of a certain maturity of experience, preferably in their forties or their fifties, whose lives had somehow gone awry. What interested him most was to study the dissidence between what they were and what they might have been. In very young people there was nothing to study, because they had not had any experience. Young people are what they are; but what they might have been has not yet been developed for investigation. Now, in the theatre, of course, the prevailing audience is young. Mr. David Belasco has stated that the average age of his audience is under twenty-five. And since young people are mainly interested in youth, it is

not surprising that a mature study of mature people, like "The Thunderbolt," was not so popular at the box-office as the earlier plays which were written by Pinero in the decade of "Sweet Lavender."

People who have merely read Pinero's plays but have not heard them in the theatre sometimes feel that his dialogue is rhetorical and stilted. But it is admirably written for the stage. I once talked with him about his dialogue; and he told me that, if ever he should write down a transcript of actual conversation, it would not sound natural at all when it was spoken on the stage. He knows that it is necessary to write with some degree of artifice if the actor is to suggest the easy fluency of off-hand conversation. Very few literary critics are good judges of dramatic dialogue: they do not know how to distinguish between the written and the spoken phrase.

I have known several actors, of both sexes, who have appeared in the original casts of plays by both Pinero and Shaw; and they have all told me the same thing about the dialogue of these two authors. They all say that Pinero's lines are easy to learn, easy to speak, and easy to remember, and that Shaw's lines are hard to learn, hard to speak, and hard to remember. The late Louis Calvert, who created several leading parts for both authors, was particularly emphatic in his testimony on this point. He told me that, in playing a Shaw part, he was always worrying about the lines. He was always afraid that he was going to forget them, and he frequently did. But, in playing a Pinero



part, he never worried about the lines, because they tripped along so naturally. The actors all say that Pinero's dialogue is so right that it never troubles them at all; and, since the business of the dramatist is to write dialogue for actors and not for literary critics, I think the actors know.

## SIXTH LECTURE

### JOHN GALSWORTHY

MARCH 17, 1924

IN judging the plays of Mr. John Galsworthy, we should not allow our critical opinion to be influenced by the fact that he happens to be the most distinguished man of letters, with the possible exception of Sir James Barrie, who is writing for the English theatre at the present time. It is of course an honor to the English stage, and incidentally an indication of how far it has progressed since Sir Arthur Pinero initiated the modern English drama with "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" in 1893, that so eminent a man of letters as Mr. Galsworthy should turn his attention to writing plays; but his literary eminence, in itself, does not necessarily make him a great dramatist. I need scarcely remind you that the drama must not be regarded as a subdivision of literature, and that the literary element is only one of many that enter into that synthesis of nearly all the arts,—the drama. Many excellent plays do not belong to literature at all. We have before us in New York this season a striking instance of this fact in Max Reinhardt's superb and splendid production of that spectacular pantomime, "The Miracle." A vast majority of all the plays in history have not

been written by men of letters; and the very greatest plays, in nearly every instance, have been written by men of the theatre, rather than by recruits from the literary world.

I remember a conversation which I had some years ago with Mr. George M. Cohan, at a time when he was directing the rehearsals of a play which I had written in collaboration with Mr. A. E. Thomas. We were trying the piece out in Atlantic City; and, as we strolled along the boardwalk, Mr. Cohan referred to the fact that everybody in the United States, apparently, was writing plays and that so many hundred manuscripts were sent to every manager's office every month. And then Mr. Cohan said, "The remarkable thing is that good plays—the sort of plays you can consider for production—are written only by playwrights. I get plays written by lawyers, and plays written by doctors, and plays written by college professors, and plays written by social reformers, and plays written by editors, and plays written by poets, and plays written by novelists,—and none of them are any good. The only ones that are any good are plays written by playwrights."

"But how does anybody get to be a playwright?", I asked.

"I don't know," answered Mr. Cohan. "But I do know this: on the one hand, there are the playwrights—there are perhaps twenty or thirty of them in America; and on the other hand, there are all the other people in the world, who don't know how to write plays."

"But can't some of these lawyers or novelists or col-

lege professors eventually learn to write plays?", I suggested.

"Well, if they ever do," retorted Mr. Cohan, "why, then, they will be playwrights; and I have said already that playwrights can write plays."

That scarcely seemed to offer a solution of the enigma; but every manager and every actor knows what Mr. Cohan had in mind.

Quite frequently in history, a playwright—like Sophocles, or Shakespeare, or Molière—has become a man of letters; but not often has the process been reversed and an instance been revealed of a man of letters who has become a playwright. Nearly all of the great English poets of the nineteenth century tried to write plays—Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Browning, Mrs. Browning, Arnold, Swinburne, Tennyson; and there is not a good playwright in the lot of them. Browning, of course, affords us the most striking instance in the nineteenth century of the failure, as a dramatist, of a really great man of letters simply because he did not happen to be a man of the theatre. His poems give every evidence of a tremendous ability for dramatic characterization; but, although he tried, over and over again, to apply this great gift to the service of the stage, he failed completely, because he could not learn to understand the psychology of theatre audiences.

Nearly all of the great dramatists have been people of the theatre—either born and brought up in the theatre or associated with the theatre from a very early

age—and many of them have been actors. Sophocles was a boy actor. He first came into prominence at the age of fourteen, or thereabouts, when he was chosen to lead a chorus of youths at the celebration of the victory of Salamis. He had learned dancing and singing and acting in his childhood; and, of course, when he became a playwright, he directed all his own productions. Shakespeare, as you all know, began his career in the theatre in a very humble capacity, and became an actor before he became a playwright. Molière was an actor throughout his whole career—an actor-manager who wrote parts for himself and plays for his own company—and he died, practically, on the stage. There is an anecdote that, when Louis Fourteenth asked the eminent critic, Boileau, to name the greatest man of letters of his reign, the monarch was astounded when Boileau replied, "Molière, Sire," for it had not occurred to him that the amusing comedian should be regarded seriously as a writer.

To come down to more recent times,—the education of Ibsen took place entirely in the theatre. He began life as a stage-manager,—the stage-director of a provincial theatre in Bergen. He never went to college, and he had no literary training whatsoever. To the end of his days, he remained almost astonishingly ignorant of the literature of the world. He had read translations of the leading plays of Shakespeare and he had read a few plays by Schiller; but he had never read the Greek dramatists, and, when critics compared him with Euripides, he did not know what they were

talking about. During the last thirty years of his life, he made it almost a point of pride never to read anything except the daily newspaper. He had no use for literature. The leading playwright in our own language at the present time, Sir Arthur Pinero, began his career as an actor and acted for seven years. Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has spent his whole life in the theatre. After Sir James Barrie had fallen in love with the theatre, he became so completely fascinated by it that, although he used to be a man of letters, he has not written a book since 1902. That is the sort of people, usually, who write plays. Good plays are rarely written by men of letters, who are interested more in life than they are interested in the theatre. Good plays, as Mr. George M. Cohan said, are written by playwrights.

I have said all this, in a preliminary statement, in order to excuse, as well as to explain, the shortcomings of Mr. John Galsworthy as a playwright. In view of the fact that his first play, "The Silver Box," was not written till he was thirty-nine years old, it seems to me very remarkable that he should be so good a playwright as he is, and not at all surprising that he is not a great playwright.

For Mr. Galsworthy as a man of letters, I have all but the highest respect. I say "all but," because I reserve the highest respect for the highest; and I doubt if any man now living and writing in our language deserves absolutely the highest respect except Mr. Rudyard Kipling. Mr. Galsworthy is a very able nov-



elist and a very fine literary artist. He is endowed with a beautiful serenity of mind—and this in a period when minds that are serenely beautiful are singularly rare. He is one of the few living people who are able to write English prose,—that is to say, who really have educated ears. In recent years, it has become unfashionable to write English prose. Our popular authors splash around in a cacophonous jargon which obviously is not prose. They write with manner, instead of writing with style. Parenthetically, let me say that, if your ears have forgotten the sound of English prose in the midst of all the raucous din that has environed us these many years, you should rush home and re-read "The Wind in the Willows," by Mr. Kenneth Grahame. Be sure to read it aloud, and to hearken to the sound of it, as it flows along, syllable by syllable, phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence, with a music as of many rivers sliding to the sea. There are only a few people, any more, who care for English prose; but Mr. Galsworthy is one of them.

Because of his training as a novelist, Mr. Galsworthy is habituated to regard life truthfully,—to see it steadily, even if he does not see it whole. He is accustomed to create characters who are really alive, and he is able to depict them without any subtraction from their reality. He constructs his stories with a punctilious sense of form. He is a deliberate and conscious and very careful artist, and everything that he writes conveys that satisfying sense which we receive only from a completely finished thing. Yet he is not a

great playwright; and I am willing to predict that he never will be, and never can be, a great playwright. What, then, does he lack? He lacks the something that Mr. George M. Cohan knows about but is not able to define. He has all of the gifts that are necessary to the dramatist except the one gift of loving the theatre absolutely,—of loving the theatre even more than life.

I seem to hear George Meredith—who sits now with my other gods upon Olympus—retorting with that famous line of his,—“But Life, some think, is worthy of the Muse!” Of course it is. I know, and you know, that life is greater than the theatre. I am not denying that: I am merely saying that Shakespeare did not think so, nor Molière, nor Ibsen. And if Sir James Barrie had thought so, he would not have forsaken life and literature to pass all of his days in the playhouse.

There is a man in this roaring and tremendous metropolis of ours who loves the theatre more than life. I do not think that he is a great dramatic artist; but he is at least a typical dramatic artist, as typical as Molière. Mr. David Belasco knows nothing and cares nothing about what goes on in life outside of the theatre. Quite literally, he lives in the theatre, and has lived in the theatre all his days. He works in the theatre, eats in the theatre, sleeps in the theatre. That is his life; and, when he makes a production, you will see that he has devoted weeks and months of concentrated interest to the task of entertaining the pub-

lic to the best of his ability. Of course, such a life is circumscribing. Most of us, I think, would rather be Mr. Rudyard Kipling than Mr. David Belasco. Mr. Kipling gets about more and sees more of the world. Of course a really great dramatist ought to emerge from the theatre every now and then, long enough at least to learn how sedulously nature, as expressed in ordinary daily life, strives to imitate that dramaturgic art which is cultivated in the playhouse; but the dramatist who stands at the other extreme from Mr. Belasco, who lacks the instinct for the theatre, who does not care about the theatre enough to live in it at least while one of his own plays is in rehearsal, who does not (as the actors say), "love the smell of the footlights," such a dramatist lacks something, with a lacking that is irremediable.

The trouble with Mr. Galsworthy, at bottom, is that he does not really like to write plays. He likes to write novels. He does not have to tell us that; his novels tell us for him. He likes to write prose; to know that all we have to do is listen to his sentences. But I am afraid that he writes plays from a sense of duty,—“duty, that pale ash of a burnt-out fire.” He feels that he has certain things to say about the problems of contemporary life, that it is his duty to say these things to the public, and that these things can be said to the public most effectively through the medium of the drama. When he wrote “Justice,” for example, he wanted to arouse the general public to a sense that something was wrong with the prison

system and that the machinery of the courts was in need of amendment; and, since the subject was rather too important to be attended to by merely writing a letter to "The Times," he deemed it his duty to gather an audience together and to deliver his message from the stage. From the point of view of social service, that was an admirable purpose; but I wonder what Shakespeare would have thought of it. There is something a little appalling in the idea of anybody writing a play from a sense of duty. The great plays of the world have all been written because their authors wanted to see how strong a kick they could deliver to the emotions of a gathered audience. You will remember that never, at any time, did Shakespeare write a play to reform anything, to improve anything, or to uplift the public. He never discussed contemporary problems of politics, religion, or sociology. He told stories which were jolly or were thrilling, as the case might be; he told them for the fun of telling them; he measured his success by the tears and laughter and applause of his helter-skelter audience; and he cashed in at the box-office. Molière accomplished a great deal toward reforming the ills of the world; but he did it by making people laugh and giving them a good time.

It is not an easy thing for an earnest person to uplift the public, because he is likely to approach the task from the wrong end. If he feels that it is his duty to uplift the public, he probably feels that he stands on a higher level than the public and that, in order to uplift the people, he must reach down and pull the

people up. This attitude reminds me of an admirable proverb which was written several years ago by the sagacious Mr. George Ade: "In uplifting, get underneath." The sort of person who wants to uplift the public in the theatre seldom finds it easy to get underneath; because, in order to get underneath, he would have to sacrifice his own sense of superiority to the public. I do not mean to class Mr. Galsworthy with the professional uplifters. He has something which they lack,—and that is wisdom. But, with all his wisdom, he has also a certain aloofness from life which prevents him from mingling and mixing with the populace.

Of the prominent authors writing for the English theatre at the present time, Mr. Galsworthy, by birth and breeding, is the most patrician. You may remember that he declined a knighthood several years ago; and, in England, a man who declines a knighthood doesn't need one. Mr. Henry Arthur Jones is the son of a tenant farmer, and began life as a commercial traveler; Sir James Barrie is the son of a weaver in a little Scottish village; Mr. Bernard Shaw is the son of an impecunious government employee; but Mr. Galsworthy, in his ancestry, is a gentleman, in the technical sense in which that word is still employed in England. He was educated at Harrow and at Oxford; and, since he was endowed with ample means, he traveled for ten years and visited many countries in all parts of the world, in preparation for his literary career. His first novel was published when he was

thirty-two years old; and he wrote four or five other novels, including such admirable works as "The Country House" and "The Man of Property," before he turned his attention for the first time to the drama. He is a man of fine family, established social position, and plentiful means. To all appearances, he has never suffered any hardship and has never had any great hindrances to struggle against. That is the reason, doubtless, why Mr. Galsworthy is so intensely, so almost desperately, interested in the problems of the poor,—in the inequitable difficulties that confront the despised and rejected of this world. He keenly feels the patrician's sense of responsibility for the errors of the social order. When Dickens wrote about the poor of London, he was writing about his own people; he was one of them. But when Mr. Galsworthy writes about the poor, he writes as a social investigator. He, who himself has always been well nurtured by society, walks among the desperate poor, inquiring why they are so miserable. Because he has an earnest social conscience, he feels that something ought to be done by people like himself, whose lives are easy, to relieve the misery of the multitudes, whose lives are hard. He does not know what ought to be done; but at least he can write a play to call attention to the need of doing something. I am inclined to think that, for a dramatist, it is a distinct disadvantage to be a born aristocrat, because the drama is such a democratic art and the theatre is such a democratic institution. It is difficult for Mr. Galsworthy to be companionable



with the public. He sits a little too lofty and too aloof in life ever to be, as our phrase is in political America, "one of the gang."

He seems to know nothing, or to care nothing, about the psychology of theatre audiences. He does not seem to understand that the mind of a crowd is less intellectual and more emotional, less judicial and more partisan, than the minds of the individuals of which it is composed. At any rate, he writes plays for the crowd precisely as he writes novels for the individual, addressing his appeal to the judicious intellect. That is one reason why all his plays read so well and why many of them act so badly.

I do not know of any other dramatist who seems to have so little feeling for an audience. He has visited this country several times and has appeared in public; and I dare say that many of you have seen him and have heard him deliver an address. In that event, you must, I think, have been impressed by his presence and his personality. He is a man benignant in appearance, with a face that might be positively beautiful if it were not quite so dignified; and there is a quiet serenity about him. Yet, despite his impressive presence, his lectures were not popular. In the literal sense, they were "lectures"; for I believe that the word "lecture" really means a "reading." He appeared on the platform, made a dignified bow, opened up a printed pamphlet, read it word for word from the beginning to the end without ever allowing his eyes to wander from the printed paper to the faces

of his auditors, made another dignified bow, and left the platform. Of course the audience had a deadly time. President Butler once said that anybody who would write out a lecture in advance and read it verbatim to an audience was insulting the printing press; and I heartily agree with him. The only fun in lecturing arises from the adventure of not knowing in advance what you are going to say or how you are going to say it, and of happening now and then upon a happy thought; and unless the lecturer has a good time, you may be certain that the audience won't have a good time either. While Mr. Galsworthy was in New York, he was invited to come to an informal supper party at a very well-known club of dramatic artists and to say a few words casually to the members; but he declined the invitation and explained regretfully that, in all his life, he had never anywhere in public spoken a single impromptu sentence. I don't think that his reticence arises from personal embarrassment, or what actors call "stage fright"; I think that it arises, rather, from his punctilious sense of form. In order to assure himself that what he says will be perfectly expressed, he feels that he must write it out and read it. But a man who does that, however eminent he may be as a literary artist, has no sense of an audience; and a man who does not know instinctively how to talk to a crowd must necessarily be lacking in one of the prime essentials of the equipment of a playwright.

Mr. Galsworthy's first play, which, as I have said,

was written at the age of thirty-nine, after he had already established a reputation for himself as a distinguished novelist, indicated clearly the philanthropic social purpose which he desired to accomplish in the theatre. This play was called "The Silver Box." When a rich man's son got drunk and stole a trivial object, his act was regarded as a joke; but when a poor man, in desperation, stole a trivial object, his act was regarded as a crime. That, in a single sentence, was the theme of "The Silver Box"; and it was the author's purpose to call attention to the fact that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor. Incidentally, he wrote a very interesting play. The story was told in a simple, straightforward, and effective manner; and the pathetic figure of the charwoman, Mrs. Jones, remains one of the most appealing figures in Mr. Galsworthy's gallery of portraits. The next year, he wrote a piece called "Joy," which was not a good play at all. It was written just as carefully as "The Silver Box." It would be difficult to tell by reading them how wide was the divergence in dramatic merit between these compositions; but it was not difficult to tell when they were acted on the stage.

Mr. Galsworthy's third play was "Strife," which was produced in England in 1909 and in New York in 1910. This is the most massive piece that he has ever made for the theatre and is probably his greatest play. I will talk about it in some detail, because it is thoroughly characteristic of his work. If you had time to read only one play of Mr. Galsworthy's, and

wanted to find out as much as possible about his merits and defects as a dramatist, I think that "Strife" would be the play to read.

At the works of a tin plate factory in Wales, there has been a strike for several weeks. The workmen on the one side and the capitalists on the other are equal in strength. Neither side is strong enough to win, but each is strong enough to keep the other from winning. The capitalists are led by a very strong man, Anthony, who has devoted his entire life to that big factory and is determined to fight to the end. The workmen are led by a very able and eloquent man, named Roberts, who is equally determined to fight to the end. The strike has already endured for weeks, and both sides are suffering heavily. In the first act, we are made acquainted with the capitalists' side of the contention. We attend a meeting of the Board of Directors. Anthony is as firm as a rock; but already his fellow-directors are beginning to turn against him. They have lost so much, and are continuing to lose so much, that they are beginning to think that it would be cheaper for them to make peace than to carry on the fight to a finish. At the outset of the second act, Anthony's daughter visits her former maid-servant, who is now the wife of Roberts; and in this scene we see the terrible effects of the protracted strike on the women and children of the laborers. In the second scene of this second act, we attend a mass-meeting of the laborers. They have been starving for several days, and most of them are on the point of giving in. Then

Roberts ascends the platform and addresses the crowd with fiery eloquence. He carries the workmen with him; and just as he has aroused the mob to a climax of enthusiasm, word is brought to him that his wife has collapsed and died of starvation. In the last act, the two strong men, Anthony and Roberts, are both repudiated by their followers and each of them is broken. Anthony, the great capitalist leader, is voted down by his own Board of Directors and left with nothing more to live for. Roberts, also, is deserted by his followers, and his wife has died in vain. In the end, the strike is settled by a compromise and both sides accept, word for word, the very terms which had been suggested and rejected before the strike began. So, absolutely nothing has been gained. Neither side has won. Both sides have lost. And the biggest man on each side has been shattered and ruined irretrievably.

"Strife" is a very impressive play; and yet it did not please the public. I did not see this piece in England, because it failed immediately there; but, when I saw it at the New Theatre in New York, it was admirably acted and produced. If any of you remember that production, I think you will agree with me that the piece received a wonderful performance. Now, why is it that so impressive a play, a play that dealt sincerely with a subject of such vital importance to the contemporary public, a play so firm in structure, so true in characterization, so direct in dialogue, why is it that such an admirable work was a failure in the

theatre? Why didn't the public want to see it, either in England or in America? The reason, the perfectly obvious reason, is that "Strife" is a dispassionate, non-partisan composition,—that the author refuses to take sides, and will not permit the audience to take sides. He sits like a judge upon the bench; and the case is tried before him. The capitalists state their argument to the best of their ability. The workmen state their argument to the best of their ability. Thereupon, Mr. Galsworthy remarks judicially, addressing his remarks to both of the contending parties, "What you say is right in certain respects, but in certain other respects it is not right. There can be no decision in this case: it is dismissed.—Call the next case!" Of course, everybody in the courtroom who is on the side of the capitalists wants to throw things at the judge, and everybody who is on the side of the laborers wants to do the same, and nobody is happy.

If you intend to interest a theatre audience in a dramatic struggle, you cannot be non-partisan. You must take sides, and you must permit the audience to take sides. You can even afford to take the wrong side, if you fight gallantly enough; but the one thing you cannot afford is to remain too proud to fight. The auditors must want their side to win and want the other side to lose; they must be elated when their side gains a point and worried when the other side gains a point; because it is precisely for that kind of enjoyment that people go to the theatre. You might say, if you were neutral-minded, that audiences ought not



to be so partisan. The fact is that they are, that they always have been, and that they always will be.

If Mr. Galsworthy wanted to show that, in the average industrial contention, there is right on both sides, if he was unwilling, in a single play, to ally himself either with labor or with capital, why shouldn't he have written two different plays,—one on one side and one on the other? Ibsen would have been capable of that, as we may learn by comparing "The Wild Duck" with "An Enemy of the People." Mr. Galsworthy might have invented a strike in which the laborers were right [they sometimes are] and have told the story from the point of view of the laborers, putting the audience on that side, wanting the laborers to win. Then, the next year, he might have invented another strike, in which the capitalists were right [they sometimes are], and have told the story from the point of view of the capitalists, putting the audience on that side, wanting the capitalists to win. Both plays might have been good plays; and, in that event, both plays would have been successful. The public would have had a good time rooting for the laborers one season and rooting for the capitalists the next. But, in watching "Strife," the public could not root for anybody.

Why do crowds of people go to football games? They go for the fun of wanting their side to win and the other side to lose. The only enjoyment in following the game is the enjoyment which arises from partisanship. But imagine being taken to a football game

between two fresh-water colleges that you have never heard of and watching it fought out to a final score of nothing to nothing! Yet that is the way in which Mr. Galsworthy plans a dramatic entertainment.

Let us examine another example of his Olympian neutrality. I hope that many of you saw "The Pigeon" when it was presented in this city in 1912. It was the first production made in the Little Theatre by Mr. Winthrop Ames, and one of the finest productions I have ever seen in New York. "The Pigeon," to my mind, is a very charming play; but it will never be popular with the ordinary theatre-going public. It has an interesting theme. Mr. Galsworthy tells us that all the people in the world may be divided into two classes,—the tame birds and the wild birds. The tame birds live comfortably in cages, like canaries. They like to live in cages, which have such conveniences as bath-tubs, and in which meals are miraculously delivered at stated hours every day. But there are wild birds in the world who cannot live in cages. Now, says Mr. Galsworthy, all the laws of society are made by the tame birds. The tame birds, the domestic birds, the birds that live in cages, are the only people that bother to make laws. The wild birds of the world are too busy doing other things,—soaring sunward, for example, through the windy and cloud-navigated sky. The tame birds have a passion for making cages in which they may incarcerate the wild birds; they appoint themselves their brothers' keepers. But the wild birds do not retaliate; they wing their way alone.

Consequently, says Mr. Galsworthy, the tame birds and the wild birds of the world can never understand each other.

To illustrate this fable, he brings into the studio of a philanthropic artist, one Christmas Eve, three adventurers, all of whom are wild birds. All three are social derelicts; all three are down and out; and the question, obviously, is, "What is to be done about them?" Mr. Galsworthy asks that question and allows three different characters to propound three different answers. There is a justice of the peace who gives one answer; there is a professor of sociology who gives another; and the third is given by the philanthropic artist. But the author indicates, and we perceive, that none of these three answers is of any use. Something ought to be done with the wild birds of the world; but nobody knows what to do with them. The play ends, therefore, with a sense of general futility. The discussion is closed without arriving anywhere.—Call the next case!

We may now examine Mr. Galsworthy's habits as a dramatist in regard to his construction, in regard to his characterization, and in regard to the writing of his dialogue.

He constructs plays very carefully, and at times he constructs them very well; but he has one besetting fault, which has injured a good many of his plays and ruined some of them. He does not seem to be able to distinguish properly between those incidents of a story which must be acted out on the stage and those

other incidents of the same story which may be assumed to happen off-stage while the curtain is up, or between the acts while the curtain is down. To state the matter technically, he lacks the instinct of the born playwright for what Francisque Sarcey called the "*scène à faire*" and what Mr. William Archer calls the "obligatory scene." Time and again in his plays, just when he arrives at a point where a certain scene is demanded by the audience, that is the one scene which he refuses, or at least neglects, to write. To cite an instance of this sort of disappointment, let me refer you to the last act of "*Justice*." You may remember that Falder, in the first act, steals some money because he wants to elope with a certain woman. He is caught and tried and sent to jail. Then, in the last act, he has served his sentence and is set at liberty. Remember that the reason why Falder stole the money was that he loved a woman, and that the one thing that has kept up his spirits at all through all his suffering has been the thought of getting out of jail and going to this woman. Now, at the outset of the final act, we who constitute the audience are informed of something that Falder does not know. We are told that, while Falder was in jail, the woman that he loves has been forced to sell herself to her employer, in order to keep her two children from starving. This fact is told to us in such a way that we do not blame her; we excuse her on the score of economic necessity; but we know that, when Falder finds it out, he will be heart-broken. At last these two are brought

together,—Falder and the woman for whom he went to jail. We sit forward in our seats. Now, we say to ourselves, we are going to have the great scene,—the scene for which we have been waiting for three acts and a half. Falder will have to find out that she has been living with another man; and it will be worth the price of admission to hear what he will say and see what he will do. We grip the arms of our chairs. And then—what use do you suppose that Mr. Galsworthy makes of this dramatic opportunity? In case you have forgotten, I shall make you wait for the length of an otherwise unnecessary sentence before I tell you. One of the minor characters opens a door that leads off-stage up centre, remarks, in effect, “You probably have a good deal to say to each other,” ushers them out, and shuts the door behind them! While that great scene is going on off-stage, we are left on the hither side of that forbidding door, listening to the unimportant conversation of minor characters who are merely marking time. Ultimately the door opens, Falder comes out, starts down the stairs, jumps over the bannisters, and kills himself. When we are told that he is dead, we realize all the more how great a scene we must have missed. In the hands of a real dramatist, that would have been the best scene of the play. Why did Mr. Galsworthy leave it out? Probably because he lacked the instinct of the born playwright; yet it is barely possible that he may have considered the scene and left it out deliberately. He may have felt that, if he wrote that scene, the audi-

ence would become personally interested in Falder, who until then had been a colorless figure; and, for his purposes, it may have seemed more important that the audience should remain impersonally interested in the machinery of justice.

Twelve years after Sir Arthur Pinero had written "Iris," Mr. Galsworthy attempted to treat precisely the same theme in "The Fugitive." It is interesting to compare these plays. They are so similar in subject-matter and in story that attention naturally turns to technical treatment; and the comparison reveals clearly the difference between the method of a great playwright and the method of an author who is not a great playwright. We are present at every crisis, or turning-point, save one, in the career of Pinero's heroine; but nearly every crisis, or turning-point, in the career of Mr. Galsworthy's heroine happens off the stage between the acts. People come on and tell us what has happened, and we feel a little like remarking that the news is interesting if true. "The Fugitive" is remarkable in characterization, and it is written just as well as "Iris"; but, in construction, "Iris" is a great play, and "The Fugitive" is a bad play, and there is no comparison between them.

Do you remember the ending of "The Mob"? Nothing could be more absolutely undramatic. This play tells the story of a high-minded statesman who had become unpopular. The mob threw bricks at him and he was killed. Then, after the curtain has been down for an entr'acte which covers the imagined lapse of



many years of time, it rises again and reveals a statue of the statesman, now idolized by the very public that had stoned him. The statue stands alone on an empty stage. Not a single actor is present; not a single actor enters. The spectators are expected to read the inscription on the base of the statue; and then the curtain falls. That is Mr. Galsworthy's idea of a dramatic ending,—a lifeless statue standing alone on the stage while all the actors have been relegated to their dressing rooms.

So much for his construction. His strongest point as a playwright is, of course, his characterization. He creates people who are utterly alive; but he does not always, nor even usually, fashion them in such a way that they make good acting parts. He is thinking of life when he creates his characters; but he is not thinking of his actors. He is often exceedingly unfair to them. He will bring an actor into a situation where he naturally longs to do something and then order him not to do anything at all. Throughout the entire second act of "Justice," which represents the trial of Falder, the leading actor is forced to sit still in the prisoner's dock and is given nothing to say or to do. You may remember a rather clever saying that went the rounds some years ago, to the effect that Mrs. Fiske over-acted her under-acting. Well, Mr. Galsworthy, as a playwright, over-acts his under-acting. He is too desperately afraid to permit the theatre to become theatrical, even when occasion warrants.

I remember how Mr. O. P. Heggie, who is one of

the ablest actors and stage-directors in our theatre, complained when he was playing the part of Cokeson, the quaint old lawyer's clerk in "Justice." He told me that it was the most difficult part that he had ever done in his life. The trouble with it was that Cokeson was continually saying quaint things, at which it would have been very easy to allow the audience to laugh, but it was Mr. Heggie's duty to prevent the audience from laughing, so that the attention might be concentrated on Falder. A dramatist who knows the theatre does not treat his actors that way; he does not ask them to play against the audience instead of playing to it. Do you remember the final line of "Justice," which is spoken by the part of Cokeson? The line is utterly in character and is precisely what Cokeson, who is a quaint, religious person, would have said in actual life; but Mr. Heggie told me that it was almost impossible for an actor to read it properly. Falder has committed suicide, and Cokeson says, "He is safe with gentle Jesus." The difficulty was to say that in a Broadway theatre without allowing it to sound profane; and the danger was that somebody in the audience would laugh.

7 To come to the final point, Mr. Galsworthy's dialogue is admirable from the literary point of view, but it is not always effective from the theatrical point of view. Perhaps it bears too close a resemblance to actual conversation; for there is such a thing in art as imitating life too faithfully. Mr. Galsworthy does not write dialogue with the brilliancy of Shaw, the

cleverness of Pinero, or the charm of Barrie. But his writing is simple, natural, straightforward, and sincere.

I find that most of my remarks about Mr. Galsworthy this morning have been adverse. That is because I have been speaking of him as a playwright. If it had been my privilege, instead, to talk about him as a novelist, you would have found me fighting on the other side. I hope you will not carry away an impression that I do not admire Mr. Galsworthy; because I do. He is a great man of letters, and he is probably a great man; and perhaps it is more important to be either of these things than to be a great playwright. But I do object to the prevalence of what may be called undramatic criticism of this particular author's plays. To assume that, because he is a great man or even a great man of letters, his plays must be great plays is to leap from major premise to conclusion without completing the syllogism with the necessary minor premise.

## SEVENTH LECTURE

### LUIGI PIRANDELLO AND MAURICE MAETERLINCK

MARCH 24, 1924

THIS morning, for the sake of contrast from our recent subject-matter, I shall say a few words about Luigi Pirandello and Maurice Maeterlinck; and, since some of the words that I shall have to use recurrently are words that it is very necessary for you to understand in the sense in which I use them, I shall begin by attempting to define them. During the course of the conversation this morning, I shall frequently use the word "reality" and the word "actuality," the word "truth" and the word "fact"; I shall also use the words "realistic" and "romantic"; and, therefore, as I say, I want to be sure that you know what I mean when I employ them.

In general, I should like to advise you never to use words of that sort without first defining them in your own mind and knowing precisely what you mean by them at the moment when you are to use them, and without also making sure that the people you are writing for or talking to understand the particular sense of the terminology that you employ. If you are not certain that they understand that sense, be sure

to define the words before you use them. We continually read in the newspapers words used in comments on current events without any definition whatsoever. Such words as "radical" and "conservative," "progressive" and "reactionary," assume a different meaning in the mouth of every politician who utters them. When Mr. William Randolph Hearst employs the adjective "American," he means "anti-British"; but when Mr. George Sylvester Viereck employs the same adjective, he means "pro-German." I remember that, some years ago, when such a question was still fashionable, I was occasionally asked whether or not I was a socialist. To this question I invariably answered, "If you will first define socialism and tell me precisely what you mean by a socialist, I shall then be able to tell you whether I am one or not." That always stopped the conversation. The inquirer was never able to define what he meant by socialism. I think that a great deal of superfluous religious controversy could be avoided if people would only get together and agree upon a definition of the word "Christian." Obviously, if Bishop Manning is a Christian, Dr. Percy Stickney Grant is not; yet they continue, illogically, to wear the same label, as if they believed in the same religion.

Within the last year or two, I have read in several reviews of the current theatre a word that I do not understand,—the word "expressionism." Since all art is a form of expression, I cannot understand how any one particular method of art can be any more ex-

pressionistic than any other method. I have never used the term "expressionism" in my writing or my conversation, because I do not know the meaning of it; and I have never found anybody else who knows what it means. Yet the word is frequently employed by various professional writers, who don't know what they mean by it. Apparently they use it because it sounds impressive. Perhaps, if they are paid by the word, they even charge extra for it. Now, a hundred different writers, using the words "realistic" and "romantic," may have a hundred different meanings in their minds. All that is necessary is that each writer should know precisely what they mean to him and should make sure that his readers understand the sense in which he uses them.

To dispose of fundamentals first of all, I want to be assured that you make no confusion in your own minds between "fact" and "truth." "Reality" is the realm of "truth"; "actuality" is the realm of "fact"; and the distinction between "reality" and "actuality" is the same as the distinction between "truth" and "fact." The drama, of course, is a form of fiction; and the purpose of all fiction is to represent certain truths of human life in a series of imagined facts. Sometimes the facts of fiction are invented, sometimes they are selected from actuality; but, in either case, they have to be imagined. The only valuable fiction is fiction that is true. All fiction may be divided into two classes: good fiction, which is that which tells the truth, and bad fiction, which is that which tells lies



about life. Actual facts are not necessarily true. There may occur in actuality exceptional or accidental facts which are not representative of reality and which, therefore, must be altered by our imaginations in order that they may be translated into the truth. The best fiction, which includes the best drama, is, of course, more true than the average facts of actual experience.

Facts, you will notice, are concrete and are appreciable by the senses. Facts may be seen, they may be heard, they may be smelt, they may be touched, they may be tasted. Sometimes they appeal to our sense of temperature. Facts may be hot, facts may be cold. But truth is abstract. It cannot be seen or heard or smelt or touched or tasted. It is not hot or cold. It is not appreciable by the senses but only by the imagination. Truth has to be imagined; and no truth can come into our consciousness except as a result of an exercise of our imagination.

In the search for truth, our scientists collect for us a multitude of apparently related facts. They arrange them in groups, and compare them and contrast them. Then they make a guess at the truth which underlies and correlates them. This hypothesis is subsequently tested by reference to further facts; and, if it continues to work, it is accepted pragmatically as a truth. Then, after we have found out the truth about something or other, our artists may illustrate that truth for us by translating it back from the abstract and general into terms that are concrete and particular.

Now, realism and romance are two different ways of telling the truth in art; and the difference between them is a difference in the direction of the trend of thought. The realist expounds his truth inductively, but the romantic expounds his truth deductively. The realist leads his audience from the particular to the general. He starts out by setting forth a series of invented facts which are similar to the facts of actual experience; and then, by inductive reasoning, he gradually formulates the truth which is the message of his work. But the romantic works in the contrary direction, and leads his audience from the general to the particular. He begins by announcing the truth which is the message of his work; and then from this truth, which is abstract, he proceeds to deduce a series of invented facts which translate it into concrete terms. Whenever I use the word "realist," I mean an artist whose method is inductive, or who works from the particular. He begins by announcing the truth which "romantic," I mean an artist whose method is deductive, or who works from the general to the particular. A hundred other critics may attach a hundred other meanings to those terms; they have as much right to define them in their own way as I have to define them in mine; but their meanings are not my meanings, and, when I use those words, please remember that I use them in the sense I have defined.

Since truth is abstract and has to be imagined, it follows that the realm of reality is necessarily an imaginative realm. Most of the time, most of us are

merely moving in a universe of actuality and are not living in reality at all. Most of the time we are not really alive. We are really alive only at those moments when our imagination, stimulated to activity, succeeds in transmuting into reality the facts by which we are actually environed. Most of the facts of our lives do not matter. Only those facts matter that are realized by our imagination.

Under ordinary circumstances, what you have for dinner does not matter. I can prove that to you easily. Let me ask you specifically what you ate for dinner on the night of February 19, 1924. That is not very long ago. Tell me quickly what you ate for dinner. You do not know. It made no impression on your mind. Therefore, memory, which is the most familiar function of the imagination, cannot recreate a record of the experience. But there are certain dinners that you had in your past life which you can remember perfectly. You may remember everything you had to eat at a certain dinner fifteen or twenty years ago. Why? Because that actual dinner was transmuted into a real dinner by the process of imagination.

So it is with all the other experiences of our lives. For sixteen hours out of every twenty-four, our waking senses are assailed by millions of facts, and most of the time we pay no attention to them. The mind does nothing with them. The imagination does not vivify them with its alchemy. If I should venture to say that one hour out of every twenty-four is transmuted

into real experience by the process of imagination, I should be putting the estimate extravagantly high. I dare say that the average person is really alive only a few hours a year,—if then. An extraordinary person may experience some moment nearly every day when he is really alive; but the moment won't last very long. Certain people of astonishing physical and mental energy—like the late Theodore Roosevelt, for example—may manage to keep alive for an hour or two at a time; but very few people are as strenuous as that. While they are alive, their imagination is digesting the facts of experience into truth, very much as the stomach digests food and transmutes it into the fibre of the body. Since our only real existence is in our own imagination, it logically follows that, at times when we are not imagining ourselves, we do not really exist. Apparently, if we accept the evidence of dreams, we go on with existence in our sleep; but, most of the time when we are awake and walking in the world, we simply don't exist at all. When you go home to-day, take a look at the faces of the people in the subway and ask yourself how many of them are alive. I haven't seen a live one for weeks. If I do see one to-day, the experience will be so startling that I shall be forced to restrain myself, in order to avoid arrest for speaking to a stranger. We exist only when our imaginations are alive; and what we are at any moment is merely the sum-total of all that, in the past, our imaginations have made out of us. What we call our character, and what other people call our personality, is merely

a memory of all that we have been,—that is to say, a memory of all that, by due process of imagination, we have made out of ourselves.

The reason why art is necessary in the world, as a means of telling truth, is that ordinary minds abhor abstractness as nature abhors a vacuum. The average imagination cannot apprehend a truth unless it is translated into terms of concrete fact. Therefore, the artist is called upon to incorporate ideas in images that can be seen and touched. If I say to you, "Let us imagine the idea of beauty," I am not at all confident that you will imagine anything; and, even if I talk a little less abstractly and say, "Let us imagine the perfect body of a perfect woman," I am not at all sure that you will be able to do so. But if I say, "Let us remember what the Venus of Melos looks like," I know that you will meet me upon common ground, because I have set an image before you. The man who made that statue translated the abstract idea of beauty into the concrete terms of the perfect body of a perfect woman. Yet the truth itself remains abstract; and the visible beauty of the Venus of Melos is only a concrete representation of an abstract idea. You might, if you were German-minded, bomb the Louvre from the air and shatter the marble image into dust; but you could never shatter the memory of the idea out of all the minds of all the people who have seen the statue and who, seeing it, have managed also to imagine it.

Few minds can work in the abstract. That is why

all the religions of the world have to translate their truths into concrete terms. They have to deal with images. All public and communal religions, of necessity, are forms of idol-worship. The crudest people make images of wood and stone and worship these, knowing all the time, at least half-consciously, that what they are really worshipping is an idea. People who are a little more advanced dispense with images of wood and stone but still retain a literary image; they imagine their God in human terms, as having a human body, but a body much finer than that of the ordinary man. A higher form of anthropomorphism is arrived at when people become able to dispense with the body and to imagine their God as having a human mind, but a mind much finer than that of the ordinary man. Men in general create God in their own image, by raising their own most cherished attributes to the *n*th power. Only the most imaginative people, who are exceedingly few, are able to conceive the idea of God as an idea, and to imagine a God who is not human, either in body or in mind. Dante summed the matter up when, somewhere in the course of the greatest poem in the world, he said, "The Scriptures speak of God as having hands and feet, but mean far otherwise." To talk to most people about God, it is necessary to set an image before them.

In a world populated only by people gifted with the highest degree of imagination, it would not be necessary to make a Venus of Melos. Somebody would merely say, "Imagine the idea of beauty," and the



people would imagine it, and the idea would be, to them, just as beautiful a presence in their minds as the Venus of Melos is to us, as we see her at the end of that long corridor in Paris, leaning a little backward through the air and gazing far beyond us with that face which is so utterly serene. Plato told us that we did look upon abstract ideas, in a realm of reality, before we were born into this world, and that we are going to look upon them again, in the same realm of reality, after we are dead. That is, in some respects, a wonderful idea; but I hope it isn't true. I don't think I should want to live in a world where art was not necessary. I should miss the statues and the pictures, the cathedrals and the theatres, of this mundane sphere where men cry out for images as children cry for toys and where the white radiance of eternity is tempered to us by transmutation through a dome of many-colored glass.

Don't think that I have utterly forgotten that I am expected to talk to you about the contemporary drama. I am not really wandering from my text. What I have said already is a prelude to what I shall have to say about Maurice Maeterlinck and what he is trying to accomplish in the theatre, and it is also an explanation of the little that I shall have to say about the work of Luigi Pirandello. Each of these authors is not interested in actuality, but only in reality; and each of them understands that reality can be arrived at only through the process of imagination.

Pirandello's play, "Six Characters in Search of An

Author," which most of you have seen, might almost be taken as a treatise on the difference between actuality and reality. The thesis of the play is that fictitious characters are more real than actual people. We have already agreed upon that point. I have said already that the vast majority of actual people are not real at all, except at moments that are very rare. A hundred years from now—which is not very long—it will be as if most or all of us now gathered in this room had never existed. Other actual people will sit here in our places, discovering what we now discover and kindling a little to the wonder of the world; but we shan't count at all. I suppose that a hundred years from now—which is a very little time—not even our own great-grandchildren, or our great-great-grandchildren, will remember our first names. I know the name of one of my great-grandfathers, who died only seventy years ago; but I have never been sufficiently interested to look up the names of the others. If I ever have a great-grandchild of my own, it is more than probable that he won't know that I ever lived at all and that he owes his life to me. We have not any permanent existence, because, even while we breathe above the ground, so little, so pitifully little, of our lives is real. We pass out of existence, and we pass out of memory in the winking of an eye, because there is so little of us to remember. But the great characters of fiction continue to exist, because they are really alive. Hamlet has been alive now for three hundred and twenty-two years; Œdipus the King has been alive for twenty-

four centuries; and there is no danger that either of these people is going to be forgotten by our great-great-grandchildren. They are more alive than I am, or than you are, because more truth has been digested into their composition. More truth has been imagined and realized and personified and made concrete in those fictitious figures than you and I are able to imagine and realize and personify in our own actual selves.

If you want to keep alive for a century, you must get somebody to turn you into fiction. One way, of course, to do that is to have somebody make a biography out of you; then whether you will live or not will depend upon the prowess of the author. Certain characters in history—Napoleon, for instance—are kept very vividly alive by an endless output of biographic fiction. We are continually imagining Napoleon, continually realizing him; and though his ashes are hearsed within the Invalides, he seems to have as good a chance to remain alive indefinitely as *Œdipus the King*. I should not be surprised if Abraham Lincoln should remain alive as long as *Hamlet*. Only sixty years ago, he was merely actual, like you and me; but already he is real. The reality of Lincoln has been achieved by the imagination of the nation that he lived to save. He has become an idea; and ideas do not die.

Now, Pirandello, being a novelist and a playwright, is of course particularly interested in the creation of real people,—the creation of fictitious characters who

are more real and more alive than their creator. As a practicing novelist for thirty years, he has created hundreds of characters and is thoroughly aware of their reality. When an author is planning a novel or a play, there is a period in which the characters have already been created and carry on a very real existence within the author's mind, despite the fact that he has not yet written the novel or the play. Now, probably, at some moment or other, Pirandello was struck with some such thought as this: "What would happen if I were suddenly killed, with a lot of newly created characters in my head, that I had not yet put into a play?" It is an interesting question. The characters are already alive, already realized; but the author has not yet had time to write their biographies. If you kill the author, will you kill those characters too? It does not seem likely. Those characters are so much more real than their creator. Can they be killed by hitting him heavily on the head? If so, it would be very terrible for any author to be killed shortly before his latest play was written; it would be even more tragic than for a woman to be killed a week before she was to give birth to a child.

At any rate, Pirandello wanted to talk about the reality of imagined characters; and that is why he wrote "Six Characters in Search of An Author." We see the bare stage of the theatre where a silly piece of false fiction—which is not reality—is being rehearsed by a company of actors—who are not true artists; and in walk six imagined characters who are real and true.

These six characters have been created for a play that has never been written, because the author has been hired to write the silly piece that the actors are rehearsing; and they walk in and ask, "What about us?" Then they proceed to act out their own play; and the author has no control over them whatever. He cannot tell them what they may do nor what they must not do. He is condemned to watch them and to listen to them as they live out their own lives upon the stage. That is all there is to "Six Characters in Search of An Author,"—an expression of the truth that fictitious characters are more real than actual people.

A week or two ago, I saw another play of Pirandello's, called "Henry the Fourth," or, as it has been rechristened by the American manager, "The Living Mask." I thought it was a very bad play, because the audience did not understand it. Whenever an audience fails to understand a play, I do not blame the audience, I blame the author. It is his duty to be clear. I have no patience with a playwright who complains that the public is unintelligent or inattentive; he should have expected it to be so. The Elizabethan rabble were unintelligent and inattentive; but, when Shakespeare took their money, he gave them their money's worth.

Since I had intended to see "Henry the Fourth," I did not read the text of the play in advance. Good plays are written to be seen, not to be read. But, because I was not familiar with the text, I experienced

the same perplexity that sat so heavily on the surrounding audience; and I did not discover what the play was about, until the author told me. I happened to dine with him the other night; and his explanation of what he had tried to do in that play seemed to me much more interesting than the play itself.

The point that he wanted to expound in "Henry the Fourth" was that personality is not static, but in constant fluctuation. A man is not the same person from hour to hour, or from minute to minute; his personality is continually melting from one mood into another, so that what we call the same man may be mean to-day and generous to-morrow. Personality is like a flowing river. We cannot walk over here to the foot of 116th Street and say that what we see is the Hudson River. The whole stream that sweeps down from its source to its mouth is the Hudson River; and all we see is a tiny fraction of it as it passes by. You think that you are listening to Clayton Hamilton, but you know me only as a lecturer; whereas many of my best friends have never heard me lecture and have never met the person who is talking to you now. Some of my friends know me only as a bridge-player, others only as a swimmer. Doubtless you think of me as talkative, because you have never met me except when I was talking for an hour; but there are times, when I am planning a new play or when something else is brewing in my head, that I go for days and days without saying anything to anybody, not even to my wife and children. I do not lecture at home.



We look at any person for a moment, and we may think that we see him; but the chances are that this is only an illusion. We may be looking at him at a moment which is quite unrepresentative and merely accidental. To illustrate this truth—that states of mind are continually changing and that what we ordinarily call a person is really a stream of totally different persons flowing past us—Pirandello wanted to write a piece in which each of the actors was, so to speak, a different person every time he opened his mouth and spoke.

That is a very interesting idea for an essayist, or even for a novelist; but it does not work in the theatre, because the people who constitute the theatre audience are used to fixed ideas of personality. They like the characters of a play to be easily comprehensible, so that they may take sides with the hero and hate the villain; but, if they can't find out which character is the hero and which character is the villain, they want their money back. Pirandello seems to me to lack the instinct of a man of the theatre. He was a man of letters until he reached his fifties; then he suddenly turned around and began to write plays. Throughout the many years when he remained a novelist, he had no experience of theatre audiences; and I do not think that he has yet learned the necessary difference between the technique of a novel and the technique of a play. In a novel, it is not difficult to explain that, when a certain character said so and so, he was sincere; that, two months later, when he said exactly the

opposite, he was equally sincere; and that, three months after that, when he denied both of his preceding statements, he was still sincere. But on the stage, when no explanatory comment is possible, such an exhibition of mental versatility is bewildering to the audience.

That is all I have to say this morning about Signior Pirandello, and it is not much, because he has come up in the theatre only recently, and, since I have not been in Italy since the year before the war, my knowledge of his work is confined to the few plays of his that I have seen in this country. Personally, he appears to be a man of extraordinary intelligence, very alert and alive. He is a kindly, humorous, and twinkling man, with a beautifully chiselled head, bright eyes, and restless hands; and he is very nimble, brisk, and eloquent in conversation.

We shall now turn to our main subject, which is the work of Maurice Maeterlinck. You have had an opportunity this season to see two of his major plays acted professionally in New York; but the chief reason why I want to talk about him in this course is that, in recent years, it has become unfashionable to praise him. Our reviewers nowadays appear to take a ghoulish delight in digging graves for great men who were famous in the eighteen-nineties; but truth and beauty have no date and are immune from fashion, and of authors who have once been really great it may be said, as Tytlyl says in "The Blue Bird,"—"There are no dead."

What I tried to say about truth in general at the outset of this conversation was intended as a prelude to an understanding of the work of Maurice Maeterlinck. There is one little anecdote that is often in my mind when I am talking about Maeterlinck. When Robert Louis Stevenson was a very little boy, he drew a crude picture of a man and showed it to his mother. "Mamma," he said, "I have drawed a man. Shall I draw his soul now?" What interests Maeterlinck is not drawing a man, but drawing his soul. He is not interested in actuality at all; he is interested in reality. What he tries to do, in all his plays, is to exhibit human souls in a realm of reality.

The most extraordinary fact of Maeterlinck's career is the time when it occurred. Dates usually are of very little interest; but, in this instance, the dates are important. He was born in 1862 and wrote his first play in 1889; and he became world-famous in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. That Maeterlinck should have emerged in a period of realism is an astounding circumstance. In the eighteen-nineties, the theatre of the world was dominated by Ibsen, who had just written "Hedda Gabler," the most coldly realistic of his plays; and realism was rampant in all the other arts. Yet it was precisely at that moment that Maeterlinck arose and came into the theatre of the world with a method that was utterly adverse to the current fashion. Maeterlinck was not interested in realism at all, because he thought that realism impeded the imagination

and thereby obscured reality. If you happen to be realists, you will not agree with Maeterlinck; but, if you happen to be romantics, you will agree with him. I am prejudiced on the romantic side, because I always find it difficult to realize a truth that is presented to me all wrapped up in an envelope of actuality. I don't like to be bothered with a lot of facts; it is such a nuisance to forget them, in order to get at the truth. If I have to write a chapter of history or a chapter of biography—which sometimes in my business I am called upon to do—I cannot tell the truth until I get rid of the facts. I usually get somebody else to look up all the facts, somebody who is perfectly reliable, the sort of person who wears a Ph.D and a pair of spectacles; then I proceed to throw most of them away, and, on the rare occasions when I do a good job, I succeed in getting at the truth. The reason why the fact collectors—or fact mongers, we might call them—never write biography or history which is true is that they get all tangled up in actual details. The reason why most college professors cannot teach you anything is that they know too much.

In the eighteen-nineties, everybody was collecting facts and imitating actuality; but Maeterlinck said to himself, at the outset of his career, that to deal with facts is nothing but a nuisance. Most of them you have to change; many of them you have to throw away; why bother with them at all? Why not start out with the truth, and represent it in such a way that the spectator is not forced to view it through an intervening

veil of facts. Since truth is abstract, why not tell the truth abstractly?

So Maeterlinck decided, in his theatre, not to bother the spectators with such concrete categories as time and place. His plays should happen "once upon a time,"—"long ago and far away." You would not ask in what country or what century the play was happening; because such things do not matter to the human soul. The clothes that people wear don't matter; so why not dress them vaguely in a drapery of beauty? He wanted to get rid of all the trappings and the suits of actuality and let the audience listen to the soul.

The thing that interests me most about Maeterlinck is that his plays are more real than those of any of his contemporaries. When I see a realistic play, I often hesitate to take the author's word. I find myself saying to the author, as it were, "I am not so sure about this as you seem to be. You state that the facts are as you have shown them,—that you have given a faithful representation of actuality. But how do I know? You had better let me go to the place that you describe and look up the facts for myself." That is what I feel like saying when I see such a play as Maxim Gorky's "Night Lodging" or one of the dreary dramas of Anton Tchekoff. But when I see a play of Maeterlinck's I know instinctively that what he says is true. There is nothing to investigate. There are no facts to question. The play is real.

Now, how does he arrive at this reality? How does he manage to dramatize the soul? The process might

be described as the process of removing veil after veil of enveloping actuality until at last there is revealed the naked truth.

In illustration, let us take an early play of his, which is thoroughly characteristic of his method. The theme of "The Death of Tintagiles" is fear. What the author wanted to represent in this play was the emotion of fear, what fear does to the soul, and how the soul feels when it is afraid. He knew that any primordial emotion, like fear, becomes more and more powerful in proportion as it becomes more and more abstract. The greatest fear is abstract, just as the greatest idea of beauty is abstract, or as the greatest idea of God is abstract. You are not very much afraid when the object that you are afraid of is concrete. For instance, if you are afraid of a dog, you can chain up the dog, and laugh at it. If you are afraid that you may die of smallpox, you may get vaccinated; and if you are afraid that your bank may fail, you may draw out your money and buy Liberty bonds. If your fear is concrete, it isn't much of a fear; because there is always something that you can do to alleviate it. But Maeterlinck knows that fear is scarcely worth imagining until you do not know what it is you are afraid of. The only real fear is abstract; and the less you know what you are afraid of, the more you are afraid.

In "The Death of Tintagiles," Ygraine and Tintagiles are afraid. They never know what they are afraid of, and neither do we. They are just afraid. Now, notice how dramatically this abstract idea of fear



is represented in the last scene of the play. It is, of course, set forth concretely, so that the multitude, which demands hands and feet, can understand it.

Ygraine and little Tintagiles have been running away, ever since the beginning of the drama. They don't know what they are running away from; but, for hours and hours, they have been running down the long corridors of a shadowy castle. Something is going to happen to Tintagiles. They don't know what is going to happen to him. That is why it is so terrible. In the last scene of the play, we find ourselves confronted by a tremendous iron door. It is the tallest and most iron door in the world,—Plato's idea of a door. And leading up to the door is a long, long stairway. It is the longest stairway in the world. Little Tintagiles is on the other side of the door; and his sister, Ygraine, comes crawling up the longest stairway in the world to try to rescue him. She is exhausted by this time, and each step of the stairway is an agony. At last she arrives before the tallest and most iron of all doors: and behind it is little Tintagiles. She tries to open the door. She has no tools but her own fingers. We hear the frantic voice of Tintagiles crying, "Hurry! Hurry! Open the door! Open the door!" She pounds upon the door, she hurls herself against it, she tries to tear it open with her finger-nails. Something horrible is going to happen. The voice of Tintagiles grows fainter; and Ygraine cannot get through the door. That is the end of the play; and, in my opinion, it is one of the greatest moments in the whole history

of the theatre. Nothing could be more terrible than the fear in this play. That is the way we imagine fear in our dreams: we are trying to push through great doors that do not open, we are trying to save things from horrible fates that we do not understand.

In another early work,—a little play called "The Intruder,"—we are sitting in a room in which a family is gathered. A door opens. Nothing visible comes in. Death has walked into the house. To see a door open by itself and refuse to close again is more impressive as a visual device than to see the ghost in "Hamlet."

If I had time to take up in detail all the early plays of Maeterlinck, we should merely find that they all illustrate the same essential point,—the abstractness of reality. His dramas all took place in the dream world of his imagination, until he wrote "Monna Vanna" in 1903. With this play, he started a second career. At that time, he was married to Georgette Leblanc, an operatic actress, and the part of Lady Giovanna was designed for her. In "Monna Vanna" the people are more actual than those of his earlier pieces; but, though he was dealing with the people of an actual period of history, he still managed to make them absolutely real and was not bothered very much by the intrusion of facts. Then, in his third and latest period, he has explored the realm of abstract reality again, in such plays as "The Blue Bird" and "The Betrothal." In "The Blue Bird," for example, Tyltyl is given a special gift for seeing all things as they really are. He wanders through the universe seeing the souls of things; and,

as we wander with him, we perceive that all the little, nameless, unremembered facts by which we are environed in our daily lives, but which we never notice, have souls as well as we, reaching tiny hands out toward us through the intervening veil of loneliness.

The dialogue of all the plays of Maeterlinck is written with the uttermost simplicity. You will not be able to appreciate his writing unless you read French, because Maeterlinck cannot be translated. There are two kinds of writing that defy translation,—a very elaborate style like that of Rostand, and a very simple style like that of Maeterlinck. None of Maeterlinck's translators that I have ever tried to read has succeeded in reproducing the extreme simplicity of his style. To be sure, the stage directions, in a play like "Sister Beatrice," are elaborately literary; they are written in magnificently ornamented prose. But the dialogue is devoid of ornament; it is written in little un-grown-up words, so simple that the ear feels tender toward them.

I cannot tell you much about him personally; because I never met Monsieur Maeterlinck until he visited New York, and then I saw him very little,—in fact I had a talk with him only once. The thing that impressed me most about him was the peculiar beauty of his face. He has a very strange face. At a first glance, he looks rather old, because of his silvery hair and his mask of dignified serenity. Then you look again, you look at his eyes, and he seems very young,—a youth in the early twenties. It is a dual countenance. You are looking through a mask of middle age at a

reminiscence of eternal youth. Then again, as another indication of that strangeness which you are likely to find in the faces of the greatest people, you will notice that one profile is very different from the other. It is a changeable face. At one moment, you feel that you have seen the man; and then, a few moments later, you notice that you had not seen him at all. He has a beautiful soft voice and speaks most exquisitely. Although I was seeing him under adverse circumstances, in the wrong part of the world, at the wrong time, he did look like himself; and I am always glad when anybody looks like himself. Few people do. Most poets do not look like themselves at all, and it is better not to see them actually; but I have held the life-mask of John Keats in my hands, and I have always been glad that he actually looked like the author of "The Grecian Urn,"

I have talked about Maeterlinck this morning in the abstract, instead of in the concrete, because that is how it happened. But, after all, it is perfectly fitting that I should have talked abstractly, because what Maeterlinck is trying to do is to teach people to contemplate the reality of life in the abstract.

## EIGHTH LECTURE

# AMERICAN DRAMA AT THE PRESENT TIME

MARCH 31, 1924

THE first thing to be said about the American drama at the present time is that it is both copious and affluent. There is a great deal of it; and much of it is very popular. This is, in itself, a remarkable phenomenon when we remember that dramatic authorship as a profession has existed in this country for less than a human life-time. When I first began to go to the theatre, a little more than thirty years ago, there was very little American drama on the stage. The first professional dramatist in the United States—and by that phrase I mean the first author who devoted his attention entirely to writing plays and never did anything else to earn his living—was Bronson Howard. His first play, "Saratoga," was produced in 1870 and his career continued to the end of the nineteenth century. I knew him very well in the later years of his life—he died in 1908—and the fact that a person of my age should have known with some degree of intimacy the earliest professional dramatist in this country affords an indication of how very recent is the development of dramatic authorship in America. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a few other American

authors in addition to Bronson Howard were established as professional playwrights,—notably James A. Herne, Mr. William Gillette, Steele MacKaye, H. C. de Mille, Mr. David Belasco, and Charles H. Hoyt. By that time, Mr. Augustus Thomas had already arrived and Clyde Fitch was rapidly arriving. There were a few others that might be mentioned; but it is safe to say that there were not more than ten or a dozen recognized professional dramatists in America at the end of the nineteenth century. At the present time, however, there are two hundred members of the Dramatists' Guild of the Authors' League of America, each of whom has had at least one play produced professionally.

New York in the eighteen-nineties was still a homely little comfortable city and had not yet become a cosmopolitan metropolis. It had about twenty first-class theatres that tried to keep their doors open for a season of about thirty weeks. At the present time, there are more than sixty first-class theatres in New York that try to keep their doors open fifty-two weeks in the year; and, as a result of this expansion, the demand for new plays is much greater than it was a quarter of a century ago.

There was little opportunity for American dramatic authorship throughout the nineteenth century. In the first place, the nineteenth century was one of those periods, which occur recurrently in the history of the drama, when the theatre was dominated by the actor and when the contemporary author was relegated to



a position of comparative unimportance. All the great actors of the nineteenth century, when they were not appearing in the leading parts of Shakespeare, presented either anachronistic imitations of Shakespeare by contemporary authors or adaptations of foreign plays, particularly French. Our greatest American actor, Edwin Booth, did absolutely nothing to encourage American dramatic authorship; and this condition remained unchanged through the career of Richard Mansfield, who was the last of the great actors of the nineteenth century.

But a revolution occurred in England in the eightennineties, when dramatic authorship came once more to the fore under the leadership of Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. As the great actors of the nineteenth century died away, leaving for the most part no successors, they were gradually supplanted in the esteem of the public by dramatic authors, so that nowadays people are going to the theatre to see certain plays because they have been written by certain authors. Whereas the attraction used to be Sir Henry Irving or Edwin Booth, the attraction nowadays is Bernard Shaw or J. M. Barrie. This revolution, occurring at the turning of the century, has been of great advantage to American dramatic authorship.

In the second place, dramatic authorship as a profession was practically impossible in this country until 1891, because of the lack of adequate international copyright legislation. The drama had been very vigorous in France from 1830 onward; and, till 1891, any

American manager could steal any successful play from France and produce it in this country without paying any royalty. Consequently, the average theatrical manager could scarcely be blamed for preferring to produce a play by the elder or the younger Dumas, for which he paid no money, rather than to risk his investment in a new play by an American author, who would demand a royalty.

Even after the passage of the new copyright law in 1891, it remained habitual with many managers to import plays from abroad rather than to produce pieces of native authorship. One of the leading theatrical managers of the eighteen-nineties in New York was Mr. Daniel Frohman. At the old Lyceum Theatre, he maintained a stock company of very fine actors who appeared in a series of very fine plays; but nearly all these plays were imported from England. The same policy was followed later, at the Empire Theatre, by his younger brother, the late Charles Frohman, who became perhaps the most important manager of his time in New York and one of the most important in London. Charles Frohman imported nearly all his plays from London and Paris. He made contracts with the leading English and French dramatists for all their future work and obtained a monopoly of their output. Whenever their new plays failed in London or in Paris, Charles Frohman would not produce them in this country; and whenever they succeeded on the other side, his only risk in reproducing them was the risk of a possible dissidence in taste between the European and

American audiences. The American theatre was greatly indebted to Charles Frohman; but he did nothing whatsoever to encourage American dramatic authorship. Since his death, our theatre has remained hospitable to importations from abroad; in fact, since the great war, we have welcomed plays from nearly every country of Europe; but, at the same time, our theatre has also offered an ever-widening opportunity for native authorship. At least a hundred new American plays are now presented every season on Broadway; and our American drama, whatever may be thought of its artistic standing, is at least more copious and affluent than that of any other country. Mr. Avery Hopwood, who is still a young man, has already earned more than a million dollars from writing plays; and I doubt if that financial record has been equalled by any of the graver dramatists of Europe.

At the present time, our American playwrights have little to complain of in the matter of opportunity. The question, rather, is whether our public has any reason to complain of what our American playwrights have done with the opportunity that has been offered to them. Have they, in the last quarter of a century, created a great drama, or, if not a great drama, at least an important and considerable drama? I am afraid that the answer to that question is rather dubious. I am not yet convinced that, even at the present time, we have an American drama, in the positive sense in which the phrase is used when we speak of the French drama, the Norwegian drama, the British

drama,—or even the Irish drama. I say “even” in the case of Ireland, because it seems astonishing that so small a country could have produced such a great drama in so short a time. The entire population of Ireland is no more numerous than that of New York City, and nine-tenths of the Irish people have never set foot inside a theatre. There are only two cities of any considerable size in Ireland, and neither Dublin nor Belfast is of any importance as a theatrical producing centre. Yet, in the short time of twenty years, the Irish have initiated, developed, and perfected a really great contribution to the drama of the world. I am so strongly tempted at this moment to change the subject of this morning’s conversation, in order to enjoy the privilege of praising John M. Synge and Lady Gregory and St. John Ervine and Lennox Robinson and Lord Dunsany, that I cannot overrule the feeling that our American dramatists, thus far, have made comparatively little of an opportunity that has been comparatively large.

If a messenger from Mars should suddenly alight in the middle of Times Square and should ask us for the names of our really important American dramatists, I am afraid that we should find it a little embarrassing to formulate an answer. I suppose that, for old sake’s sake, we should begin by naming Mr. Augustus Thomas; for, though he has been retired from active authorship in recent seasons, his career as a whole still remains more considerable than that of any of his successors. I suppose also that we should name Mr.

Edward Sheldon; for, though he has been afflicted with a very serious illness that has prevented him from writing plays for several years, he showed great promise before he was thirty-five and his enforced retirement is a serious loss to our drama. We should mention Mr. Eugene O'Neill, who has already done one or two great things and gives promise of doing more; and then we should begin to hesitate. We could scarcely go back to Clyde Fitch, because—although, in a way, he was the foremost of our dramatists—he has been dead for fifteen years; and, for a similar reason, it would be almost tragic to mention Mr. Eugene Walter. I don't mean that Mr. Walter is physically dead; but I am thinking with profound regret of the great promise which he gave when he wrote "Paid in Full" and "The Easiest Way" and of his subsequent failure to fulfill it. Augustus Thomas, Edward Sheldon, Eugene O'Neill, Eugene Walter—how much further should we go in picking out names to add to our list of really important dramatists? We have plenty of popular playwrights, many of them conspicuously successful; but that is a different thing.

You will notice that I am now implying a distinction between a dramatist and a playwright. A playwright is a maker of plays; but a dramatist is something more than that. A dramatist is a playwright who teaches while he entertains, and adds to the sum total of national thought by evolving, formulating, and expounding truths which theretofore have lain latent in the national consciousness. He must be not merely an

imitator of life but an interpreter of life, not an artist only but a seer as well. He must be not a follower but a leader of the public. He must master the stage as a medium of expression, and he must use it to express ideas. In a single phrase, a dramatist is a playwright who has something to say. It is in this sense of the word that I think we still have very few dramatists in this country, although we have a great many playwrights, several of whom, in various ways, are undeniably expert.

Now, what are the reasons why, with all the opportunities that have been afforded to us in America in recent years, we have as yet accomplished so little in the drama? I think one basic reason is that, in this country, the theatre-going public is not particularly interested in the drama. It is enormously interested in the theatre; but that is something different. The drama is an art of authorship; and the theatre is an institution which entertains the public by exhibiting a great many other things in addition to the drama. The theatre may set forth, now and then, a piece of dramatic authorship; but it also sets forth musical comedies, motion pictures, follies, revues, trained elephants, jumping dogs, and compositions by Mr. Israel Zangwill. Our American public likes to go to the theatre for the sake of going to the theatre; and it does not particularly care whether it sees the drama or some non-dramatic form of theatrical entertainment.

In this country, the development of the drama is impeded by the very prosperity of the theatre. For in-



stance, the vaudeville theatre is exceedingly popular, not so much in New York as in the other cities of the country. Hundreds of thousands of people go to see vaudeville shows every night, not to mention the millions who go to see motion pictures; and, while they are thus occupied, they cannot, at the same time, go to see the drama. Perhaps, in his theatre-going habit, the late President Wilson was a typical American citizen. In Washington, he went to Keith's vaudeville theatre once a week until his health finally broke down; but he rarely or never went to a so-called legitimate theatre to see a play. He liked vaudeville: it helped him to make the world safe for democracy. And, in regard to the theatre, many of our American citizens stand on no higher a level of culture than President Wilson.

Also, very little is done, outside our universities, to teach our American public to distinguish between the particular interest of the drama as an exhibition of authorship and the general interest of the theatre as an exhibition of showmanship. Our public is not taught to take the drama seriously as an art, because the drama is not taken seriously as an art by our newspapers or by any but a very few of our magazines. We suffer in this country from an almost utter lack of dramatic criticism. What we have instead is theatrical reviewing. Our theatrical reviewing is exceedingly well done; it is clever, it is witty, it is entertaining; but it is not critical in purpose or in method. A serious contribution to dramatic authorship is reviewed in precisely the same manner as a musical comedy or a vaude-

ville show or any of the other types of non-dramatic entertainment. I have never been able to find out why our newspapers should be so afraid to take the drama seriously. They take the other arts seriously. When a symphony of Beethoven's is played or an opera of Wagner's is produced, the musical reviewers do not try to make jokes about Beethoven's deafness or Wagner's whiskers. Our newspapers do not make fun of Rembrandt or of Michelangelo. Yet the same publications that are serious in their discussion of painting and sculpture and music are merely flippant in their discussion of the drama. The very names of Shakespeare and Sophocles and Ibsen are seized upon as incentives to ribald laughter. Since editorial policies are theoretically based on an estimate of what the public wants, it is evident that our newspapers have decided that the public does not want to take the drama seriously. But, with such an attitude established, it takes a great deal of daring and a quite extraordinary aloofness of character—such as are enjoyed, for instance, by Mr. Eugene O'Neill—to attempt to write plays seriously and to challenge the ribaldry of the reviewers.

Let us now try to survey in general the most obvious merits and defects of our American drama at the present time; and, for convenience, let us subdivide the subject and consider our most typical American plays, first, in respect to theme, second, in respect to structure, third, in respect to characterization, and fourth, in respect to dialogue.

To take up the first point,—perhaps the most obvious

defect of our American drama is that, most of the time, it is not about anything of permanent importance. Our plays are very entertaining, but their entertainment is of a momentary quality. The main reason for this is that too many of our playwrights—the majority, in fact—seem to keep their noses glued to their newspapers and to take their themes from the pages of the daily press. Newspaper reading is nothing but a habit; and it is not until we break the habit that we discover how little we have missed by doing so. At the present time, I probably spend two hours a day reading three or four different newspapers, because I have deluded myself into thinking that it is necessary to my business as an author to keep abreast of the times; but there have been periods in the past when I have not seen a newspaper for weeks and months on end, and I know that in those periods I never missed anything at all. When I was in my twenties—before the days of wireless—I used to go to sea in tramp-steamers to get away from news for a few months, in order to find out what mattered in life and what did not; and whenever, after three weeks of solitude, we made harbor and the pilot climbed aboard, I always found that nothing had really happened in the world while we had been out of touch with it. No Michelangelo had made a David, no Giorgione had painted a Madonna of Castelfranco, no Keats had written an Ode on a Grecian Urn; nothing had happened, except a few elections and murders and divorces and strikes and baseball games.

I wonder why our American public, after reading the

newspapers on the way home from business, is so eager to go to the theatre in the evening to see a dramatization of the daily press. Oil scandals are now becoming fashionable in the newspapers, and I dare say that we shall soon have a flock of plays about them. But the trouble with writing timely plays is that whatever is up to date will soon be out of date; it will undergo the fate of all things timely and slip behind the times. With timeliness as an incentive, great authorship—particularly great dramatic authorship—has absolutely no concern. The proper subject-matter for great drama is what was, and is, and evermore shall be. Even Clyde Fitch, who in many ways was the most gifted of all our American dramatists, has failed to hold the stage for fifteen years, because his plays, when they were written, were so brilliantly up to date and discussed the latest topics of his time. But a theme, like that of "Hedda Gabler" or of "Cyrano de Bergerac," which is not at all new can never be at all old. It has nothing to do with timeliness. But how many of our American plays deal with themes that are eternal, or, at the least, recurrent and perennial in the experience of mankind?

As soon as a play about some timely topic scores a big success in our American theatre, it is immediately imitated, and half a dozen other plays about the same topic are launched within the next six months. The managers, I think, in this particular regard, are more at fault than the authors; but, whoever is to blame, dramatic authorship is not going to get very far when

our playwrights spend most of their time chasing each other around in circles. Have you ever watched a Marathon race at the Polo Grounds? The contestants run twenty-four miles, or something like that, around an oval track. After half an hour, they are strung out all around the track; and, since you have lost count of the laps, you haven't the slightest idea of who is leading and who is following. Then, at the end of two hours and a half, the race is over; and it terminates at the precise spot where it began. The tired runners, for all their traveling, have not got anywhere at all. I am sorry to say that our American dramatic authorship is very much like that.

Of course the main reason for this fault is that the world of the American theatre is such a little world. Our playwrights all know each other personally and watch each other constantly; and there are certain first nights in New York when, if you should blow up the building with a bomb, you would kill off nearly everybody in America who knows how to write a play. It is unfortunate that the market for dramatic authorship in this country should be concentrated in a single city, and especially unfortunate that that single city should be New York. New York, in the last twenty-five years, has ceased to be an American city and has become a cosmopolitan metropolis. Life in New York is no longer representative of American life; and the night life of Times Square is not even representative of life in New York. Times Square is a little world of its own, as independent of America as the Principality of

Monaco is independent of France; yet it is in Times Square that our American dramatic authorship is concentrated. A person starts out to write plays, in Alabama or in Minnesota or in California, and demonstrates a certain degree of ability. If he receives any encouragement, he comes to New York. He has to come to New York, because it offers the only market for his plays. If he gets a play produced, he remains in New York for business reasons; and very shortly he becomes a Times Square person. He forgets what he knew about life in Alabama or in Minnesota or in California and begins to look at life from the Times Square point of view. It is not an American point of view at all. I don't know how to define it; but it is both artificial and constricted. All life looks alike to Times Square people, and the look of it is lacking in reality; and the Times Square mind seems to be incapable of imagining a world outside of a radius of two miles from Broadway and Forty-second Street.

Sometimes I think that the main reason why our American prose fiction, as exemplified both in the novel and in the short-story, is so superior to our American drama is that the majority of our successful writers of novels and short-stories do not live in New York. They stay at home, in Maine, in Indiana, in Georgia, in Arizona, and write about the life that is actually being lived around them. Our American prose fiction has its roots in the soil; but there isn't any soil in Times Square.

It is surely an unfortunate fact that, in this country,



our playwrights and our men of letters live in different worlds and rarely meet each other. Mr. George M. Cohan, who is one of the very ablest as well as one of the most popular of our playwrights, and the late William Dean Howells, who for many years was recognized as the dean of American men of letters, never met each other, though they lived simultaneously in the same city. Such a circumstance would be impossible in France, where every playwright is a man of letters and where nearly every man of letters learns the craft of making plays. Mrs. Edith Wharton lives in one world and Mr. Samuel Shipman in another, and I can't imagine them dining together; yet surely it is unfortunate that Mrs. Wharton cannot learn to make plays as efficiently as Mr. Shipman and that Mr. Shipman cannot learn to write English as handsomely as Mrs. Wharton. I once thought that it would be an admirable scheme if we could gather up all our playwrights and ship them away from Times Square for five years so that they might discover America and find out what our life is like, and if at the same time we could gather up all our novelists and bring them to Times Square for five years to teach them the technique of making plays. By some such drastic process we might put an end to the persistence of the long divorce between American drama and American literature.

To consider now our second point, it is obvious that the most notable feature of the construction of our typical American plays is an extraordinary cleverness. Our playwrights are remarkably inventive and are ex-

ceedingly ingenious in putting plays together. That is their most conspicuous merit. It is also their most conspicuous defect. I know of nothing else that more stubbornly impedes the development of a serious drama in this country than the extraordinary ingenuity of our authors; for too often they make plays for the sake of showing how cleverly they can make plays, instead of for the sake of saying something about life. Our drama is too technical; and a brilliant piece of virtuosity, such as Mr. George M. Cohan's "Seven Keys to Baldpate," is more admired in our theatre than a more earnest and less ingenious composition, such as the late William Vaughn Moody's "The Great Divide."

Our American playwrights perform all sorts of astonishing technical feats. Mr. Elmer Rice, at the age of twenty-one, was the first playwright in the world to tell a story backwards through time. The subject-matter of "On Trial" was of no importance whatsoever; yet this youth of twenty-one, who had never written a play before, made ninety thousand dollars out of that one piece because of his technical ingenuity. Mr. Roi Cooper Megrue, with his melodrama, "Under Cover," was the first playwright in the world to violate successfully the long-accepted principle that a dramatic author should never keep a secret from his audience. That principle had always been regarded as an axiom; yet Mr. Megrue deliberately deceived his audience until the final curtain-fall, and his play ran two or three years and made hundreds of thousands of dollars. Except for the once instance of the Hungarian author,

Ferenc Molnar, I do not think that there is any playwright living in the world who is more ingenious than Mr. George M. Cohan at his best. Consider, also, as a typical example of our latest craftsmanship, the extraordinary cleverness displayed by the two young authors of "Beggar on Horseback." Professor William Lyon Phelps told me the other day that he had seen the German original which suggested this play—I say "suggested," because the germinal idea was derived from a German author, although neither Mr. Kaufman nor Mr. Connolly has read the German text—and Professor Phelps assured me that the development of the idea by the American authors is much more brilliant than the German play.

We are exceedingly clever in our drama. That, as I have said, is one of our chief faults, because it is difficult for anybody to achieve a serious accomplishment in any art when he is too clever. Cleverness is an impediment. The great dramatic authors of the world were not clever. Clever is not a word that you would apply to Sophocles or to Euripides. You would not apply it to Shakespeare, you would not apply it to Ibsen. Shakespeare never invented any technical expedient. He let the lesser fellows do that. He never used any device in the drama until it had been tried out by some predecessor and proved to be a good expedient. Everything that Molière did in his comedies had been traditional in the theatre ever since the days of ancient Rome. It is the lesser people of the theatre who, in any period, invent new ways of making plays.

If a person is clever at all, he is just as clever at twenty-one as he will be when he is sixty. Cleverness is not a quality that grows as the mind matures. In fact, it is more likely to manifest itself in youth than at any other period. That is the reason why many of our cleverest plays are the first or second compositions of very young authors. Many young authors break into the theatre with a novel and ingenious idea and achieve a momentary success; but they get nowhere after that, because they can't invent another idea that shall be more novel and ingenious than the first. We have too many playwrights who have succeeded only with a single play. On one of his periodic visits to this country, Mr. William Archer called my attention to the fact that, whenever he came to New York after an absence of four or five years, we always seemed to have a new crop of playwrights. "What becomes of all your former playwrights?", he inquired. "Why do you throw them away, instead of helping them to develop their ability?"

But let us pass on to our third point, which is the treatment of characterization in the American drama. It may be said, in general, that our playwrights are richly endowed with the reportorial faculty,—the same faculty that makes our newspaper reporting the best in the world. They have quick and eager eyes for what is going on about them. They know how people look and they know how people behave, even if they do not always know how people think and feel. Our American drama is very remarkable in its representation of

what actors call character parts; but, on the other hand, it is comparatively deficient in its representation of what actors call straight parts. Our American playwrights have created very few leading figures that are thoroughly alive; but they have created hundreds and hundreds of minor figures—bit parts, as actors call them—that seem very much alive for the five or ten minutes while they hold the stage. In this respect, the work of Clyde Fitch was typical of our American drama. Fitch was seldom completely successful in the creation of his heroes and his heroines, but his minor characters were drawn so vividly that the memory of them long survives the memory of the plays in which they figured. Our American authors are much abler in depicting minor characters than in depicting major characters; and many of our plays are made entirely of minor characters, without a leading figure. Our American acting, also, is at its best in the depiction of minor parts. At the present time, we have very few leading actors on our stage—I mean actors capable of playing heroic parts, like Mr. Walter Hampden and Mr. John Barrymore; but I am frequently amazed at the prowess of our American actors in playing character parts. I am thinking now of such sterling performances as those of Mr. Harry Beresford in "The Old Soak," of Mr. Donald Meek in "The Potters," of Mr. Walter Huston in "Mr. Pitt," and of Mr. Louis John Bartels in "The Show-Off."

I don't know why it is that both our authors and our actors are at their best when they are portraying char-



acters that are utterly lacking in gentility. The central character in "The Show-Off" is emphatically not a gentleman; and the same may be said of the "Old Soak" and "Mr. Pitt" and "Mr. Potter." We write such parts wonderfully and we act them wonderfully; but rarely do we either write or act any parts that might be described as ladies or gentlemen. Our American comedy, as Mr. Walter Prichard Eaton has remarked, is a comedy of bad manners; and for the depiction of good manners on our stage we still rely on English authors and on English actors. I wonder why. I do not think that it is true that good manners do not exist in American life. I think that, in proportion to the population, there are just as many ladies and gentlemen in America, just as many people of culture and intelligence and taste, as there are in any other country, except France; but we rarely attempt to represent them on the stage.

Now I must pass on to our fourth and final point, which is the treatment of dialogue in our American plays. Most of our plays are written by Times Square people in the dialect of Times Square,—a curious jargon, a strange and vivid concoction of artificial slang, which somehow or other sounds quite natural when it is spoken on the stage. It bears very little relation either to literature or to life, and it changes every year or so; but it is easily provocative of laughter and it has the rhythmic merit of being snappy and concise. A great master of this language is Mr. George M. Cohan. When Mr. Cohan writes a play that purports to deal



with small town life, all the characters come on and talk the latest Times Square slang, which nobody in a small town has ever actually heard. But somehow it sounds plausible, because it seems so casual and fluent. When an American play is done in London, they publish a glossary of Times Square terms in the programme; and the London public, studying this strange language, assumes that all Americans talk like that. I remember now that, shortly before the war, when American plays were quite the vogue in London, I happened to be talking one day after luncheon with some gentlemen in the smoking-room of the Savile Club. The conversation dealt with India. I was sitting next to Colonel Balfour, who was a brother of A. J. Balfour; and, when I questioned him upon a certain point, I ventured to excuse my lack of knowledge of imperial affairs on the ground that I was an American. Thereupon Colonel Balfour turned to me and said, "You, sir, an American! Utterly impossible! You speak the English language. I can understand you perfectly." This was not a humorous remark: the Colonel was absolutely serious. Here was a brother of a Prime Minister of England who did not believe I was an American, because I did not talk the language of a George M. Cohan comedy.

To succeed in the American theatre, it is almost necessary to learn the language of Times Square, for it would scarcely be practical to write a play in English and then ask Mr. Samuel Shipman to translate it. We have here a stylistic problem which does not afflict the

authors in other countries. A French playwright writes a play in French; he uses the same standard language that is written by French novelists. An English playwright can write his plays in English. Mr. Jones writes in English, Mr. Shaw writes in English, Mr. Galsworthy writes in English; they do not have to learn a special slang that is different from their native language for the purpose of writing plays. But suppose that they were younger men and that they should migrate to America to seek their fortunes. We should then be confronted with the spectacle of John Galsworthy, Bernard Shaw, and Henry Arthur Jones hanging around Times Square and trying to learn the language. It would be very difficult to learn. As I listened to the lines of "The Show-Off," I felt that the piece was admirably written and I envied the young author, Mr. George Kelly, for his easy fluency in a dialect that is so difficult to master. Just imagine Mr. Galsworthy trying to learn the language of "The Show-Off" in order to write an American play. I think it would be easier for him to learn to write Hungarian.

The trouble with our dialogue, of course, is that it lacks permanence. "The Show-Off" is not difficult to understand to-day; but, if this play should be revived a quarter of a century from now, it may be seriously questioned if the audience would understand it. The slang language of Times Square changes very quickly. Forever hasting to keep up to date, it becomes old-fashioned in a year or two.

I believe, of course, that our dramatic dialogue

should be colloquial. I do not favor such elaborately literary composition as you will find in the plays of my friend, Mr. Percy MacKaye. Mr. MacKaye was educated at Harvard, and has never quite got over it. I think that perhaps the most satisfactory dialogue that is now being written for our American stage is that of Miss Rachel Crothers. It is neither literary on the one hand nor slangy on the other; but it is simple, natural, and colloquial. My friend and collaborator, Mr. A. E. Thomas, is also endowed with a remarkable gift for dialogue; and Mr. James Forbes, although he is perhaps a little too slangy at times, approaches much more nearly the reality of living speech than most of the playwrights of Times Square.

## NINTH LECTURE

### EUGENE G. O'NEILL

APRIL 7, 1924

LAST week, I made some general remarks about the present state of the American drama and called attention in a summary manner to some of its most obvious merits and defects. But generalizations are always subject to particular exceptions; and it is possible that any particular American play on which we might momentarily focus our attention might show itself to be an exception to nearly all the critical remarks that I ventured to make about our drama as a whole.

This morning, in response to numerous requests from members of the audience, I shall talk about the most conspicuous of the younger American dramatists at the present time,—Mr. Eugene G. O'Neill. Mr. O'Neill is obviously an exception to all rules; and that, I think, is one reason why, in this particular period, his work has been welcomed with so much critical acclaim. In the Victorian period, men were praised for making rules and trying to abide by them; but nowadays men are praised for breaking them. Mr. O'Neill's work is frankly sensational, and—to some old-fashioned people—just a little shocking; and that is one reason why it appeals so emphatically to a generation that has sub-

stituted the excessive drinking of synthetic gin for the temperate drinking of those mellower liquors which had graced the tables of all gentlemen since the high and far off days. I hasten to add that that is not the only reason. Mr. O'Neill is not merely rough, he is sincere and earnest. He not only tells the world to its face that it is condemned by the Creator and is descended from a female dog, but he is fully capable of backing up the objurgation with a healthy blow from either fist. And, like all really admirable bar-room brawlers, he has his sentimental side; and his sentiment is so humane that oftentimes it turns to poetry.

Eugene O'Neill's career is still in the crescent stage. I have forgotten his exact age at the moment, but he is under thirty-five and is still in the process of growing up as a dramatist. Upon the basis of his past performances, we should be justified in hazarding a guess that his future work will probably be strangely different from anything that he has done thus far; for it seems to be his habit to startle his admirers by continually doing something unexpected. At the present time, it would be difficult for anyone to analyze his work with any hope of estimating its ultimate importance; and, in my own case, I must confess frankly that disinterested criticism is impeded by the fact that I have known the author personally since he was a boy in his teens.

Nine years ago this summer, Eugene O'Neill kept his bathing-suit in the little cottage on the beach in

New London where I usually spend the summer, and used to come down every day to go in swimming with me. I had known him for several years before that, but I had never paid very much attention to him, because he was very shy and retiring and seldom had anything to say. If anybody at that time, which is only nine years ago, had suggested to Eugene O'Neill that I should be standing up this morning before three hundred people in Columbia University and solemnly discussing him as a dramatic artist, he would have been astounded; and I must admit that I myself would have been even more amazed. Nine years ago, he had never written a play; he had never even tried his hand at any kind of writing. Now, for the moment at least, he is generally regarded as the foremost of our playwrights and is the only American dramatist whose work is being seriously studied in Great Britain, France, and Germany. His rapid rise to fame is all the more remarkable because it has been achieved on critical grounds alone, without the impetus of any unusual success at the box-office. He first managed to attract attention by writing one-act plays for semi-professional companies operating little theatres for limited and special audiences; and, though his later and larger plays have been produced in the commercial theatre, none of them has made any considerable amount of money, with the single exception of "Anna Christie." Yet his plays, as soon as they are published, are read eagerly throughout the country; and his work is praised with such unanimous enthusiasm by the press that he is already



better known and more highly esteemed than any other American dramatist of the present or the past. Although I have been a fairly intimate witness of the various stages of his career, I am still amazed at its meteoric quality; and I don't think that this amazement arises merely from the fact that I happened to be one of those who "knew him when."

It ought to be possible to draw certain lessons from such a career as Eugene O'Neill's; and I dare say that all of you who are ambitious to write plays are eager to have me point them out. But such lessons as may be derived from his experience are of a rather extraordinary character and are not the kind of lessons that are usually taught in schools and colleges and universities. The first lesson obviously is that the best thing for you to do if you want to be a dramatist is to run away from college. Another lesson is that it is highly advisable to be a bad boy,—to be wayward and wild and unreliable and generally worthless. Another lesson is that, to score a startling success in the theatre, you should run away to sea and live in the fore-castle with foul-mouthed roughnecks who have never been to a theatre in their lives. But, to indicate these lessons in their proper sequence, I had better briefly summarize Eugene O'Neill's career.

To begin with, it is evident that he made a wise choice of his parentage. Eugene O'Neill, you know, is the younger of the two sons of the late James O'Neill, who was a very successful actor in his day. Those of you who are nearly as old as I am must have

seen him in his celebrated part of Monte Cristo, which he played for years and years. He was an accomplished actor of Shakespearian rôles; and, in a period when there were giants on the stage, he was almost in the foremost rank. Eugene O'Neill, in consequence, was born and brought up in the theatre, and learned his language from the lips of Shakespeare. Please note emphatically that he is not a man of letters. He was a child of the stage; and, like Ibsen and Molière and Shakespeare, he has escaped the disadvantage of a bookish education. The two boys, Jimmie and Eugene—Jimmie, who died last year, was the older brother—were actors in their childhood. Eugene was never a good actor; he never showed any particular inclination for the stage; but he went on in small parts in his father's productions, every now and then, because there was nothing else for him to do. His father dutifully endeavored to give him what is ordinarily regarded as a good education. He sent him through school, and finally to Princeton. Eugene stood Princeton for a little while and then ran away. I don't think that he objected to Princeton in particular—"though by your smiling you would seem to say so"—but he objected to college in general. So he ran away; and, while he was running, he ran as far as he could, and slipped aboard a ship, and signed on as an ordinary seaman.

Before long he turned up in South America. He had to earn his living there and got some sort of clerical job ashore. But he soon discovered that busi-

ness was even more objectionable than college; so he ran away again. He slipped to sea once more, and rose to the status of an able seaman in the service of the American Line. That is how he got his A.B. In the fore-castle he learned something about life,—which is rather more important than learning things about mathematics, and Latin, and history, and economics; he found out how sailors thought, and how they felt, and how they talked. Then—I have forgotten how—he drifted home again. His father's home was in New London, where I usually spend the summer; and I remember when Eugene came home, wearing a blue jersey with white letters spelling out "American Line" across the breast of it. His father did not know what to do with him. Eugene had always been a wayward boy, and Mr. O'Neill was certain that he would never amount to anything. He wouldn't go to work ashore; and there didn't seem to be much of a future for him as a sailor. In those days, Mr. O'Neill used to ask me, among other friends, what could possibly be done with this boy; and nobody was able to offer any answer.

Eugene, as I have said, was very shy and uncommunicative. He had very large and dreamy eyes, which constituted the most conspicuous feature of his face. He looked like a lad who might amount to something; but, since his speech was rather hesitant and he never said very much, he was less impressive to listen to than to look at. His father finally decided that the only way to keep him out of trouble

was to keep him poor; so he left Eugene throughout the winter in New London and gave him an allowance of eight dollars a week. That was enough to pay his board, and it was not enough to run away with. But Eugene needed pocket money for his drinks—because that was before the blow had fallen—and he managed to pick up a few dollars a week as a reporter for a New London newspaper. This job was not exactly onerous, because nothing happens in New London in the winter; and, to occupy his ample leisure, he began to try his hand at writing one-act plays.

When I returned to New London the next summer, he confessed to me with great shyness that he had been trying to write some little pieces. He hesitated to ask me to read them, for fear of imposing upon me; but he did ask me if I wouldn't teach him technically how to write a one-act play, and I answered that the technical problem was less important than the primary problem of what to write about. I advised him to find out what aspect of life, if any, he was familiar with at first hand, what characters in life he had really observed. Now it happened that the life that he knew best was the life at sea, because he had so lately been a sailor; and I made the obvious suggestion that this might be a fortunate fact. There had been several novelists of the sea and poets of the sea—Mr. Conrad and Mr. Kipling and Mr. Masefield, for example—but there never yet had been a dramatist of the sea. The average playwright knew

nothing whatsoever of the sea; and any one who really knew the sea and who could learn to say something about it in dramatic form would find a new field open to him.

Eugene wrote, as practice pieces, several one-act plays that dealt with the sea; and they showed an appreciable promise. But then the problem was to get around his father. Eugene did not want to be put to work; he wanted to write plays; and he did not relish the idea of another winter in New London on eight dollars a week. So he asked me if I could not get the old gentleman to increase his allowance by advising Mr. O'Neill to send Eugene to Harvard to study with Professor Baker. Eugene allowed me to infer, with all due respect to Professor Baker, that his main idea was to get out of New London and that Harvard might be a good excuse; but his father was rather difficult to get around, because Mr. O'Neill had the ready argument that he had sent Eugene to college once before and that the boy had run away. I suggested that, since some of the one-act plays which Eugene had been trying to write were rather promising, it might be a good plan to send one or two of them to Professor Baker to find out what he thought about them. I wrote to Professor Baker; and Mr. O'Neill was finally persuaded to send Eugene to Harvard, although he still maintained that the boy would never amount to anything. Within a few months, Eugene O'Neill was recognized at Harvard as the best of all Professor Baker's pupils; and he took a

long stride forward under the tutelage of that experienced technician and very able teacher.

The next step in Eugene O'Neill's career was the most difficult. When he left Harvard, he had written only one-act plays; and, since there was no market for such compositions in the commercial theatre, he found out that his only chance of getting any of his pieces acted would come from an affiliation with some Little Theatre group,—some association of ambitious beginners who would get together and write plays and produce them themselves. In the artist colony at Provincetown, Massachusetts, he fell in with some other amateurs who had similar ambitions to his own; and they organized the Provincetown Players and gave performances on an abandoned wharf. In the winter, they came up to New York and made productions in a barn down in Greenwich Village. If it had not been for the Provincetown Players, I doubt if Eugene O'Neill, up to this very day, would have managed to get a start in the commercial theatre. People drifted down to Macdougall Street because it was something of a lark,—a sort of intellectual substitute for going slumming. To go to the New Amsterdam Theatre and see "The Follies" was mainly an expense; but to go down to Macdougall Street and see the Provincetown Players was not an expense but an adventure. The people who make a profession of knowing what is going on in New York discovered that O'Neill's one-act plays were astonishingly good, and began to talk about them; and when he got to



the point where he was ready to write full-length plays, he could get the commercial managers to read them.

Eugene O'Neill's earliest pieces were published at his father's expense by Richard Badger of Boston, and copies were sent out for review. In this entire country, that initial volume was reviewed by precisely one critic; and that one critic was myself. It has long been out of print; and I believe that rare copies of it now sell at handsome prices, as the first published work of a noted author. But, as O'Neill's subsequent plays have been successively published, they have been widely read and have aroused nearly as much discussion in the literary columns of the press as they have received in the dramatic columns.

O'Neill's first full-length play, "Beyond the Horizon," was written—if I remember rightly—in 1917. In my opinion, it is much the best play that he has done to date; and, in view of the fact that it won the Pulitzer Prize for 1920, you might wonder why it lay around three years before it was produced. But any American playwright knows from hard experience that it is much easier to write a play than to sell it and that it is much easier to sell a play than to get the manager who buys it to produce it. With "Beyond the Horizon," O'Neill's experience was more lucky than the average. When he had completed the piece and shown it to some of his friends, he took it to a very intelligent manager, Mr. John D. Williams, who recognized its merit and bought an option to

produce it. Then he let it lie around his office for a couple of years; and nothing happened till an actor of great talent and irresistible impetuosity, named Richard Bennett, happened to be engaged by Mr. Williams to appear in a melodrama by Mr. Elmer Rice. That melodrama was fairly popular, but it was not unusually good; and Mr. Bennett soon grew bored with playing it eight times a week. While nosing around Mr. Williams' office, the actor discovered the somewhat dusty manuscript of "Beyond the Horizon." Mr. Bennett read it and announced to Mr. Williams that he was going to produce it immediately for a series of special matinées. The matinées were so successful that "Beyond the Horizon" soon drove the melodrama out of the evening bill; and the author has been famous ever since. You will infer that, after that, it was comparatively easy for Mr. O'Neill to get "Anna Christie" produced in the commercial theatre. This play, you may remember, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for 1922, and, together with "Beyond the Horizon," won for Eugene O'Neill the gold medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Well, the fact is that it took him four years to get "Anna Christie" produced. It was owned successively by several managers, who let it lie around because they thought there was no money in it; and, when it was ultimately produced by Mr. Arthur Hopkins, it made a good deal of money for everybody but the managers who had let it get away from them.

Mr. James O'Neill lived long enough to see "Beyond

the Horizon" on the stage; and when that play was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, he came to see me, all aglow with pride. "My boy"—he said—"my boy Eugene; I always knew he had it in him! Remember how I always used to say that he would do something big some day? People told me he was wild and good-for-nothing; but I always knew he had it in him,—didn't I?"—So Eugene, at last, had managed to get around his father.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Eugene O'Neill's career is the fact that, throughout his climb to prominence, he has kept himself aloof from Broadway. I said last week that most of our American plays are written by Times Square people for a Times Square audience; but Eugene O'Neill has never become a Times Square person. After leaving New London, he lived for several years in Provincetown; and now he has his home in Ridgefield, Connecticut. He rarely comes to New York except when a new play of his is in rehearsal; and, when he is working in New York, he keeps away from the theatre district in Times Square. His way of life at Provincetown was typical of his disposition. He lived there, winter and summer, in almost absolute isolation. He is a solitary person, and for the most part lives inside of himself. Such a life would be impossible to an empty-minded person who had nothing to remember; but Eugene O'Neill has knocked about the world and has not ceased to wonder at it. His solitary habit of existence makes it possible to focus his attention with

an absolute intensity, for weeks and months together, on any aspect of imagined life that interests his mind. He is not interrupted by his friends or plucked at by importunate acquaintances. In Provincetown, in winter, the telephone does not jingle and jangle all day long, and there is no hurry about the mail. In the plays of Eugene O'Neill you will observe a sustainment of intense imagination which arises from his rare ability to focus his attention and to keep it fixed.

There is another point about his way of life which—though it is rather personal—I cannot forbear to mention. This is that, throughout his years in Provincetown, he lived on almost nothing. Though his father was well-to-do, Eugene was forced by circumstances to get along without any money to speak of; and it is now possible to see, in retrospect, that this was a good thing for his work. He has never worked for money in the theatre, because he has learned to live without it. It is a great advantage for any artist, a tremendous advantage, to learn that money is not necessary. It sets him in a class apart from Mr. Samuel Shipman and all the other fellows who are eager to get rich. If Eugene O'Neill had been ambitious to make money, he would never have written any of the plays by which he is best known; for none of them was calculated in accordance with the formulas that are favored by those managers who are forever thinking of nothing but the box-office. I said last week that Mr. Avery Hopwood has made a

million dollars in our theatre; but just imagine anybody writing "The Emperor Jones" and "The Hairy Ape" if he had any ambition in his heart to make a million dollars! By this time, Mr. O'Neill is well-to-do, for he has made a little money in the theatre and he has inherited his father's estate; but I don't think that his belated affluence will do him any harm, because a man who has no interest in money in his youth is not likely to sell himself for money in his later life.

Mr. O'Neill, as I have said, knows nothing of Times Square. He is seldom in New York. He does not keep track of what is going on in the theatre and never bothers to find out which way the fashion of the season trends. He does not care about what the other fellows are doing; he cares only about what he wants to do himself. He never imitates anybody else, and he never writes a play which at all resembles any other play that has been successful on Broadway. He remains absolutely aloof from those prevailing influences that permeate Times Square which I analyzed last week as being detrimental to the development of the American drama.

One point which sets his work apart from that of any other living dramatist is the fact that—whether consciously or not—he writes primarily for an audience of men and takes little or no account of the women in the audience. The world that interests him, the world he writes about, is a man's world. Several of his one-act plays, including two or three of the very

best, are entirely devoid of women characters. In his longer plays, he has not failed to depict his women characters with truthfulness; but it is evident that he is interested in them not so much for their own sake as for the sake of their effect upon the men-folk of the play. He is interested in women because of what they do to men or because of what men do to them. His almost exclusive masculinity of interest would not be so remarkable in a novelist; but it is practically unprecedented in the modern drama. In the present period of the theatre, our matinée audiences are made up entirely of women and our evening audiences are made up mainly of women and the men that they have brought with them. From Ibsen onward, every practical dramatist has recognized this fact and has framed his plays more or less deliberately to appeal to the women in the audience. Every Broadway manager will tell you that, unless you please the women, there can be no hope for your play at the box-office. Yet along comes Mr. O'Neill, writing about a man's world for an audience of men, and upsets all established precedents by finding out that women are just as willing nowadays to see his plays as they are to go to prize-fights!

You will notice that his range of experience is rather limited. What he knows about humanity, he knows intensely; but there is still a great deal that he does not know. He is at his best, of course, when he is writing about the sea and what the sea does to the souls of those strange and wayward men who go



down to it in ships. He is also very good when he is writing about the sort of people that may be met in water-front saloons in the various ports of the world. But he appears to be incapable—thus far, at least—of writing about aristocrats or even well-bred people of the so-called middle class. I have not seen "The Hairy Ape," because I was in California throughout the season when it was produced; I have merely read the text. Of course it is difficult to judge any passage of a play without watching its effect upon an audience; but, merely from reading the lines, I should be inclined to say that the scene on deck between the aristocratic young girl and her mother is absolutely false. The author does not seem to know how two ladies of their station in life would naturally talk to each other; and the dialogue rings false, just as the long speeches of the hairy ape himself ring true. "The First Man" is another play that I have merely read and have not seen in the theatre. In this piece, Mr. O'Neill is dealing with a group of people endowed with a more than average amount of culture and education; and it does not seem to me that he has drawn them plausibly. The actors might, perhaps, have persuaded me to think so; but I am not persuaded by a reading of the text. Eventually, I suppose, Mr. O'Neill may arrive at a point in life where it may seem to him worth while, as an adventure, to put on a hard-boiled shirt and go about a bit among people who wear collars. He may find their behavior just as strange and wonderful as that of the hairy ape or

the Pullman porter who became the Emperor Jones. Some people have begun their lives in high society and ended up in water-front saloons in Shanghai or Hong Kong. Why shouldn't Mr. O'Neill reverse the process? He was fortunate enough to become familiar with water-front saloons before the first act of "Anna Christie" was rendered un-American by an amendment to the Constitution of the United States; and I can see no logical reason why he should not end up by investigating the wild life of Newport.

Meanwhile, his characters are peculiarly interesting to the theatre-going public because they are new to the theatre and have not grown stale by frequent repetition. He takes his characters from life and not from other plays. And, because he writes of people with whom the public is not familiar, he gives the impression that his experience of life has been more extensive than, thus far, it has actually been.

His range of mood is also rather limited. He has not yet done any notable work in comedy; and a picture of life that leaves out hearty laughter is, to put the matter mildly, incomplete. He is not entirely devoid of humor; but his humor is of a rather grim, sardonic type. He certainly lacks gaiety and that agreeable geniality which we are accustomed to expect of greatness. Let me remind you, in passing, that the creator of Macbeth, Othello, and King Lear was also the creator of Falstaff and of Rosalind. Mr. O'Neill's work, as a whole, is not gloomy, but it is very grave. He is at his best when he is dealing with the terrible;

and, by the terrible, I mean the horrible transfigured to a higher plane by the intercession of imagination.

You will notice that his method is essentially romantic. Much of his work has a realistic look, because of his habit of adopting a great many details from actuality; but he reasons from the general to the particular, and always there is an abstract idea at the centre of his concept. He is sometimes mistaken for a realist because of the minor fact that his characters talk like those of a realistic author who has kept his ears open; but none of his work is photographic in its method. You will observe that he always starts out with a theme and invents a story that shall illustrate his abstract thesis in terms that are concrete; and that is the final proof that he is not a realist.

I have not yet formulated any certain estimate of Mr. O'Neill's ability as a builder of plays, because I do not think that he has yet developed a full command of his technical means. Three or four of his one-act plays are masterpieces of form; yet in others he seems to have given comparatively little thought to his underlying structure. Among his longer dramas, "Beyond the Horizon" is constructed with an admirable symmetry; but it seems to me that others, like "The First Man" and "Straw," are somewhat faltering in their construction. In "Anna Christie" the first act is admirable, the second act is glorious, and the third act is thrillingly dramatic; but the last act seems to me inferior and leaves upon me the impression of a pattern thinning out into frayed edges. It is characteris-

tic of Mr. O'Neill's aloofness from the established fashions of the theatre that he does not hesitate to write a play in two acts, or a play in seven or eight scenes, even though it is too short for a full evening's performance and too long to be used as a curtain-raiser or an after-piece. In "The Hairy Ape" he seemed to be striving for a new dramatic form; but I must confess my inability to estimate the degree of his success, because, in technical intention, I frankly do not know what he was driving at. The piece interests me in its exposition of the central character; but it seems to me that the later scenes of the dramatic narrative are artificial and forced. "Beyond the Horizon" remains, in my opinion, the best of Mr. O'Neill's longer and more ambitious compositions. It is important in theme, richly and pathetically human in its characterization, well built, and admirably written.

I agree with all the other critics that Mr. O'Neill's writing is peculiarly powerful. Quite evidently, he kept his ears open when he was bunking in the fore-castle and learned at first hand how sailors actually swear; but the method of his writing is no more realistic than his method of construction. His dialogue has the flavor of actuality; but this flavor is produced by a studious application of rhetorical expedients. Mr. O'Neill is gifted with an excellent ear for rhythm and, somehow, he has learned a great deal about the effects of rhythm on the emotions of the listener. He writes with a curious kind of eloquence. He gives you the impression that he is faithfully repeating the

speech of actual people that he has observed; yet there is an emotional pulsation in his style that is not present in the daily speech of the denizens of water-front saloons. It is this pulsation which communicates itself, by contagion, to the audience and arouses an emotional response that would not be awakened merely by the meaning of the lines. It is, I think, his sense of literary style that accounts for his fondness for obscene phrases and profane ejaculations, more than any wish to shock the ladies in the audience or to assert his unconventionality. Most of the swearing in the world is done from an obscure desire to revel in the sound of words; and the language of Falstaff is, in many ways, more eloquent than that of Hamlet. Merely as a matter of literary style, it is far more effective for a dramatist to call his heroine a bitch than to call her a wanton; and this is a point that Mr. O'Neill has sensed with nicety.

I have said that Mr. O'Neill's career is still in the crescent stage; but I have no idea of what he will endeavor to accomplish in the future. He can't go on forever writing about roughnecks in the fore-castle and wastrels in the water-front saloon. He will have to broaden his horizon and make some new discovery in life. It may be that he will have to run away again. He might run away from the sea, running inland this time, and discover the sort of people who live in Iowa and long to die in Los Angeles. I really wonder what would happen if he should adopt my suggestion to run up the ladder of civilization and investigate

the lives of people who put on clean collars twice a day.

Much as I admire the work of Mr. O'Neill, I think that his achievement up to the present moment has, to some extent, been over-estimated. The fact that his plays are startlingly different from those of other dramatists does not mean that they are necessarily superior. It is harder, in a way, to beat your competitors at their own game than it is to get around them by doing something strange and new. It has become fashionable to praise Mr. O'Neill; and, naturally, he has been over-praised, especially by people who take their opinions at second hand. Fortunately, he won't be harmed by being over-praised; because I don't think that he pays any attention to what is said about him.

Yet, wherever his standing may finally be found to be, there can be no question that, at the present moment, his work is unique in the American drama and therefore worthy of unique attention. I do not know what he will do when he is fifty, but it ought to be worth while to wait around and find out; for much may be expected of an author who, before the age of thirty, could give the world so fine a play as "Beyond the Horizon."







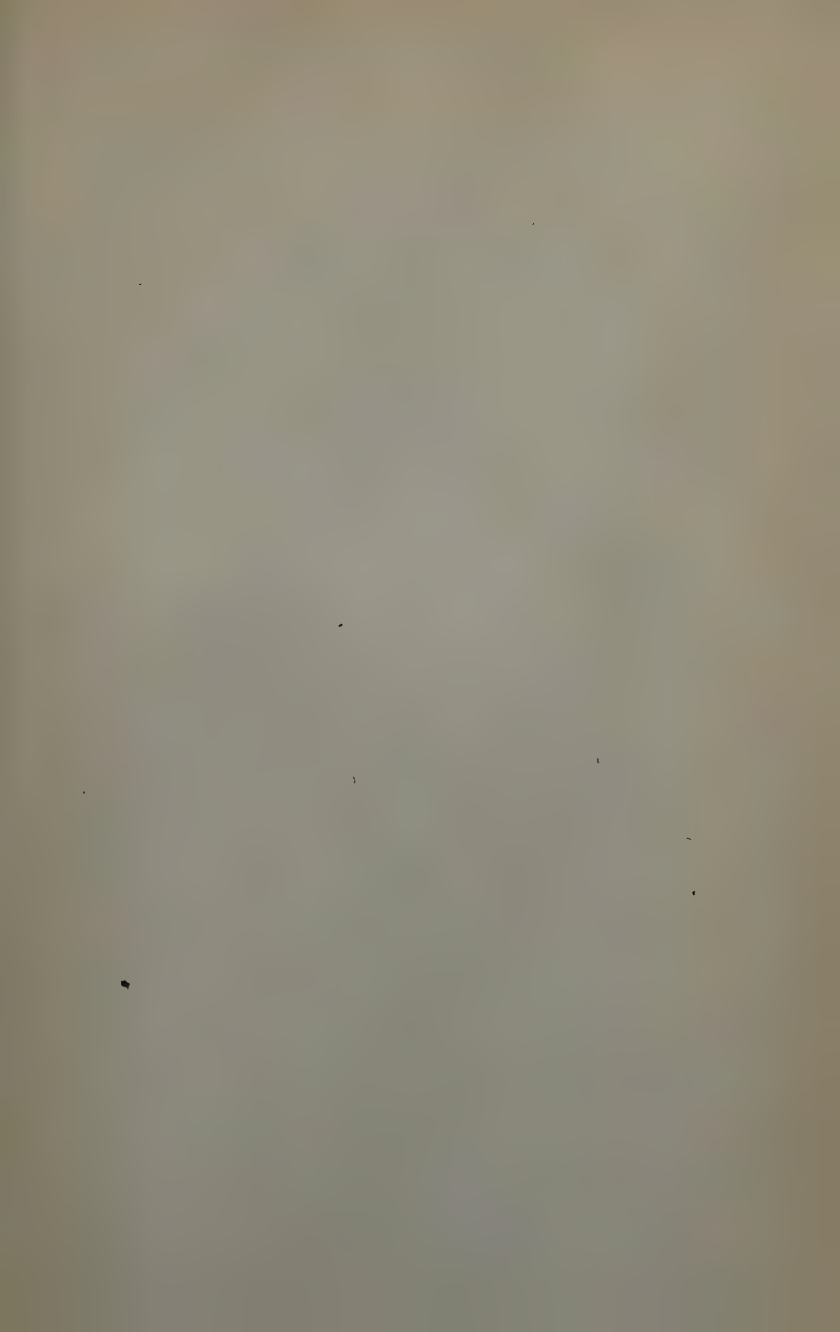




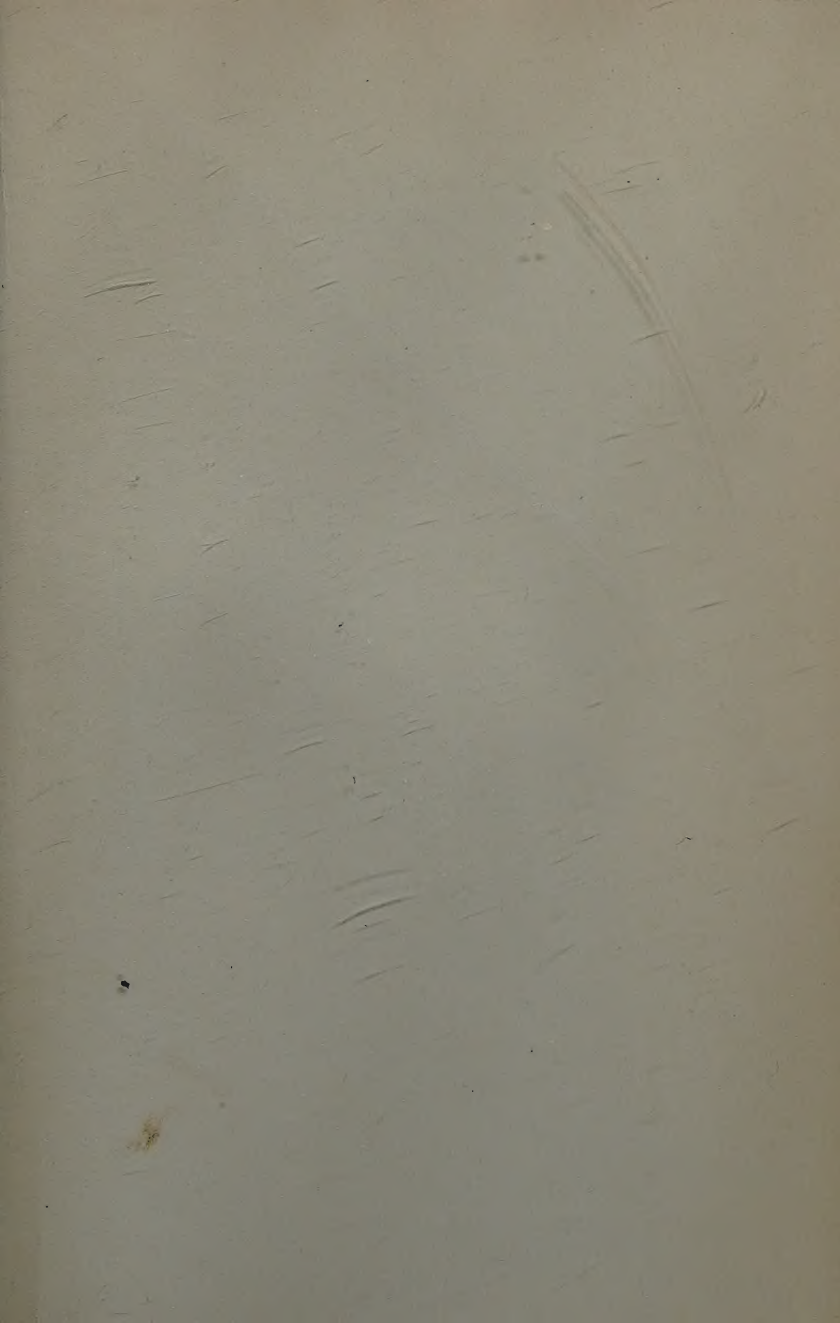












MARGARET CARNEGIE LIBRARY  
MILLS COLLEGE

THIS BOOK DUE ON THE LAST DATE  
STAMPED BELOW

Books not returned on time are subject to a fine of  
10c per volume per day.

FACULTY

~~RESERVED~~ *we 44*

APR 22

MAY 17

FACULTY

APR 13

FACULTY

FACULTY

JUL 28

FEB 3

JAN 26

FACULTY

MAY 30

FACULTY

O 18 '39

FACULTY

N 9 '37

AP 13

Ja 25 '39

Ja 31 '39

My 25 '39

Ja 20 '41

D 13 '41

JUN 2 1946

My 28 '41

JAN 7 1947

MAY 3 1948

JAN 19 '60

NOV 18 '62

NOV 29 '62

MILLS COLLEGE LIBRARY

BNF Conversations on contemporary dram  
809.2 H218c Hamilton, Clayton Me



3 3086 00094 2755

809.2

36133

H218c

Mills College Library  
Withdrawn



